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ABSTRACT

As with the regular issues of "Biography Today," this special subject volume on "Authors" was created to appeal to young readers in a format they can enjoy reading and readily understand. Each volume contains alphabetically-arranged sketches. Each entry in the volume provides at least one picture of the individual profiled, and bold-faced rubrics lead readers to information on birth, youth, early memories, education, hobbies, and honors and awards. Each entry ends with a list of easily accessible sources designed to lead the student to further reading on the individual and a current address. Obituary entries are also included and clearly marked in both the table of contents and at the beginning of the entry. Ten authors are profiled in this volume: (1) Sharon Creech; (2) Michael Crichton; (3) Karen Cushman; (4) Tomie dePaola; (5) Lorraine Hansberry; (6) Karen Hesse; (7) Brian Jacques; (8) Gary Soto; (9) Richard Wright; and (10) Laurence Yep. A series of general, places of birth, and birthday indexes is included. (BT)

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Vol. 5
1999

Biography Today

Profiles of People of Interest to Young Readers

ED 434 064

Author Series

Featured in this issue...

Sharon Creech
Michael Crichton
Tomie dePaola
Brian Jacques
Gary Soto
Richard Wright
Karen Cushman

Lorraine Hansberry

Laurence Yep

Karen Hesse

SO 031 051

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Biography Today

Profiles of People of Interest to Young Readers

Author Series

Volume 5
1999

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Preface

Welcome to the fifth volume of the **Biography Today Author Series**. We are publishing this series in response to the growing number of suggestions from our readers, who want more coverage of more people in *Biography Today*. Several volumes, covering **Artists, Authors, Scientists and Inventors, Sports Figures, and World Leaders,** have appeared thus far in the Subject Series. Each of these hardcover volumes is 200 pages in length and covers approximately 12 individuals of interest to readers ages 9 and above. The length and format of the entries will be like those found in the regular issues of *Biography Today*, but there is **no duplication** between the regular series and the special subject volumes.

The Plan of the Work

As with the regular issues of *Biography Today*, this special subject volume on **Authors** was especially created to appeal to young readers in a format they can enjoy reading and readily understand. Each volume contains alphabetically arranged sketches. Each entry provides at least one picture of the individual profiled, and bold-faced rubrics lead the reader to information on birth, youth, early memories, education, first jobs, marriage and family, career highlights, memorable experiences, hobbies, and honors and awards. Each of the entries ends with a list of easily accessible sources designed to lead the student to further reading on the individual and a current address. Obituary entries are also included, written to provide a perspective on the individual's entire career. Obituaries are clearly marked in both the table of contents and at the beginning of the entry.

Biographies are prepared by Omnigraphics editors after extensive research, utilizing the most current materials available. Those sources that are generally available to students appear in the list of further reading at the end of the sketch.

Indexes

Beginning with all publications in 1999, a new Index is appearing in *Biography Today*. In an effort to make the index easier to use, we have combined the **Name** and **General Index** into one, called the **General Index**. This new index contains the names of all individuals who have appeared in *Biography Today* since the series began. The names appear in bold faced type,

followed by the issue in which they appeared. The General Index also contains the occupations and ethnic and minority origins of individuals profiled. The General Index is cumulative, including references to all individuals who have appeared in the *Biography Today* General Series and the *Biography Today* Special Subject volumes since the series began in 1992.

The Birthday Index and Places of Birth Index will continue to appear in all Special Subject volumes.

Our Advisors

This volume was reviewed by an Advisory Board comprised of librarians, children's literature specialists, and reading instructors so that we could make sure that the concept of this publication — to provide a readable and accessible biographical magazine for young readers — was on target. They evaluated the title as it developed, and their suggestions have proved invaluable. Any errors, however, are ours alone. We'd like to list the Advisory Board members, and to thank them for their efforts.

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Ethel Stoloff, *Retired*
Librarian, Birney Middle School
Southfield, MI

Our Advisory Board stressed to us that we should not shy away from controversial or unconventional people in our profiles, and we have tried to follow their advice. The Advisory Board also mentioned that the sketches might be useful in reluctant reader and adult literacy programs, and we would value any comments librarians might have about the suitability of our magazine for those purposes.

Your Comments Are Welcome

Our goal is to be accurate and up-to-date, to give young readers information they can learn from and enjoy. Now we want to know what you think. Take a look at this issue of *Biography Today*, on approval. Write or call me with your comments. We want to provide an excellent source of biographical information for young people. Let us know how you think we're doing.

Laurie Harris
Executive Editor, *Biography Today*
Omnigraphics, Inc.
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Detroit, MI 48226
Fax: 1-800-875-1340

Sharon Creech 1945-

American Novelist for Children and Young Adults
Author of *Walk Two Moons*, *Absolutely Normal Chaos*, and *Chasing Redbird*
Winner of the 1995 Newbery Medal

BIRTH

Sharon Creech was born on July 29, 1945, in Mayfield Heights, Ohio. She has given out very little information about her family and early life, but her maiden name is Creech, she comes from a large family, and she has at least two siblings, including one who is older and one who is younger.

YOUTH

As a child, Creech loved reading, writing, and telling stories. In part, this love of stories grew out of her family experience. As she told the *Seventh Book of Junior Authors & Illustrators*, she grew up "in a big, noisy family in a Cleveland suburb, with hordes of relatives telling stories around the kitchen table. Here I learned to exaggerate and embellish, because if you didn't, your story was drowned out by someone else's more exciting one." Creech also read many books as a child, spending countless hours reading at her local library. "I don't remember the titles of books I read as a child, but I do remember the *experience* of reading—of drifting into the pages and living in someone else's world, the excitement of never knowing what lay ahead. I loved myths—American Indian myths, Greek myths, and the King Arthur legends—and I remember the lightning jolt of exhilaration when I read *Ivanhoe* as a teenager. These were all magical worlds, full of mystery and imagination: anything could happen, anything at all."

"I don't remember the titles of books I read as a child, but I do remember the **experience** *of reading—of drifting into the pages and living in someone else's world, the excitement of never knowing what lay ahead. I loved myths—American Indian myths, Greek myths, and the King Arthur legends—and I remember the lightening jolt of exhilaration when I read* **Ivanhoe** *as a teenager. These were all magical worlds, full of mystery and imagination: anything could happen, anything at all."*

Creech was an active child who liked to spend her time outdoors. She often walked through the woods near her family's home, and she enjoyed climbing trees. She recounted these early experiences in her Newbery Medal acceptance speech in 1995, in which she described what influenced her to write *Walk Two Moons*. "You could climb and climb," she recalled, "and you could reach a place where there was only you and the tree and the birds and the sky." As a child, she also liked to pretend that she was a Native American. Her cousins believed that one of the family ancestors was a Native American, and Creech would exaggerate and tell people that she was a full-blooded Indian. During her walks

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through the woods, she would re-create scenes from Native American legends that she had read about. For instance, she imagined herself as Estsanatlehi, a mythical figure who never dies. Estsanatlehi is said to grow from a baby to an old woman, then become a baby again and go through the whole process all over. Creech's interest in Native American stories lasted into adulthood, and several of her books feature themes and settings derived from Native American culture.

During the summer of her 12th birthday, Creech and her family went on vacation. They traveled by car from their home near Cleveland to Lewiston, Idaho, in the process passing through the historical homelands of many Native American tribes. On her birthday, the family stopped at a tribal reservation, where Creech received a pair of leather moccasins as a birthday present. The trip profoundly affected her, and she later used it as the basis for *Walk Two Moons.*

EDUCATION

During her early years in school, Creech began to lay the foundation for her later career as a writer. Her love of reading had made her interested in making up stories of her own. In addition, as she told an interviewer for *The Reading Teacher,* "I had some really good teachers who praised me when I needed praise, encouraged me when I needed encouragement, and helped me to recognize that I could use words. They gave me self-confidence about using words. From that I just knew that I wanted to write books."

Creech graduated from Brush High School in South Euclid, Ohio, and then attended Hiram College in Hiram, Ohio. She earned a bachelor of arts degree (B.A.) in English literature and writing at Hiram College. She took her first writing class there, although she says that she spent most of her time sitting in front of the typewriter, balling up sheets of paper, and throwing them on the floor — because that's how writers acted in movies. It was during college that Creech began to write on a regular basis. Following graduation, she attended George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, which is near Washington, D.C. There, Creech earned a master of arts degree (M.A.) in English literature and writing. At George Mason, she was able to take writing workshops and classes with such well-known writers as James Dickey, John Irving, and John Gardner. Here she describes the benefits of those courses: "This was serious business. They were blunt with their criticism, and reserved with their praise, but when you got their praise, you knew you had deserved it."

FIRST JOBS

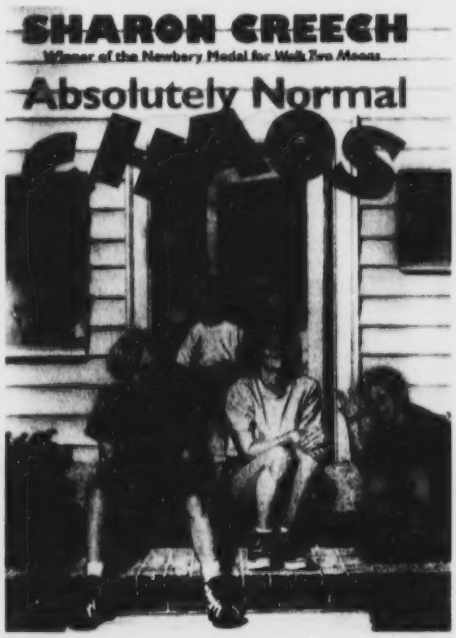
During graduate school at George Mason University, Creech began working as a researcher for the Federal Theatre Project, which was supported by the Library of Congress but housed at George Mason. She continued to think about being a writer; she has said that she "longed to write plays" during this period. However, she was not yet ready to embark on a writing career. Instead, after earning her master's degree, she went to work as an editorial assistant at *Congressional Quarterly* in Washington, D.C., working on articles about politics and government. At some point during this time she got married, had two children, and got divorced, although she usually does not give out information about her first marriage. Eventually, Creech realized that she did not enjoy working at *Congressional Quarterly*. She decided that she really wasn't interested in articles about politics and government, and she wanted to find work that was more fulfilling.

So in 1979 she decided to pursue a longtime goal of teaching by applying for a position at the English branch of a European-based school called TASIS (The American School in Switzerland). The headmaster of the school was coming to the United States to interview prospective employees, so Creech made an appointment to meet with him. After the interview, though, she knew that it hadn't gone well. The headmaster was hesitant to hire her because he thought that she would be unable to manage the demands of being a teacher and being a single parent with two children. However, Creech wrote the headmaster a lengthy and inspired letter to convince him that she could indeed handle the dual pressures of teaching and parenting. The letter worked, and she was hired. She was thrilled to be teaching literature to young people and delighted that she could expose her children to a different culture. Yet her many responsibilities left her no time to pursue her dream of writing books.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

For the next few years, Creech taught American and English literature at TASIS, located in a village in Surrey, England. In 1981, she married her second husband, Lyle D. Rigg, who at the time was assistant headmaster of TASIS in England. Rigg was appointed headmaster of the Swiss branch of TASIS in the early 1980s, so the couple and Creech's two children went to live in Lugano, Switzerland, in the foothills of the Alps. They returned to England two years later, where Creech continued to teach American and English literature. At the same time, she began to write.

Becoming a Writer

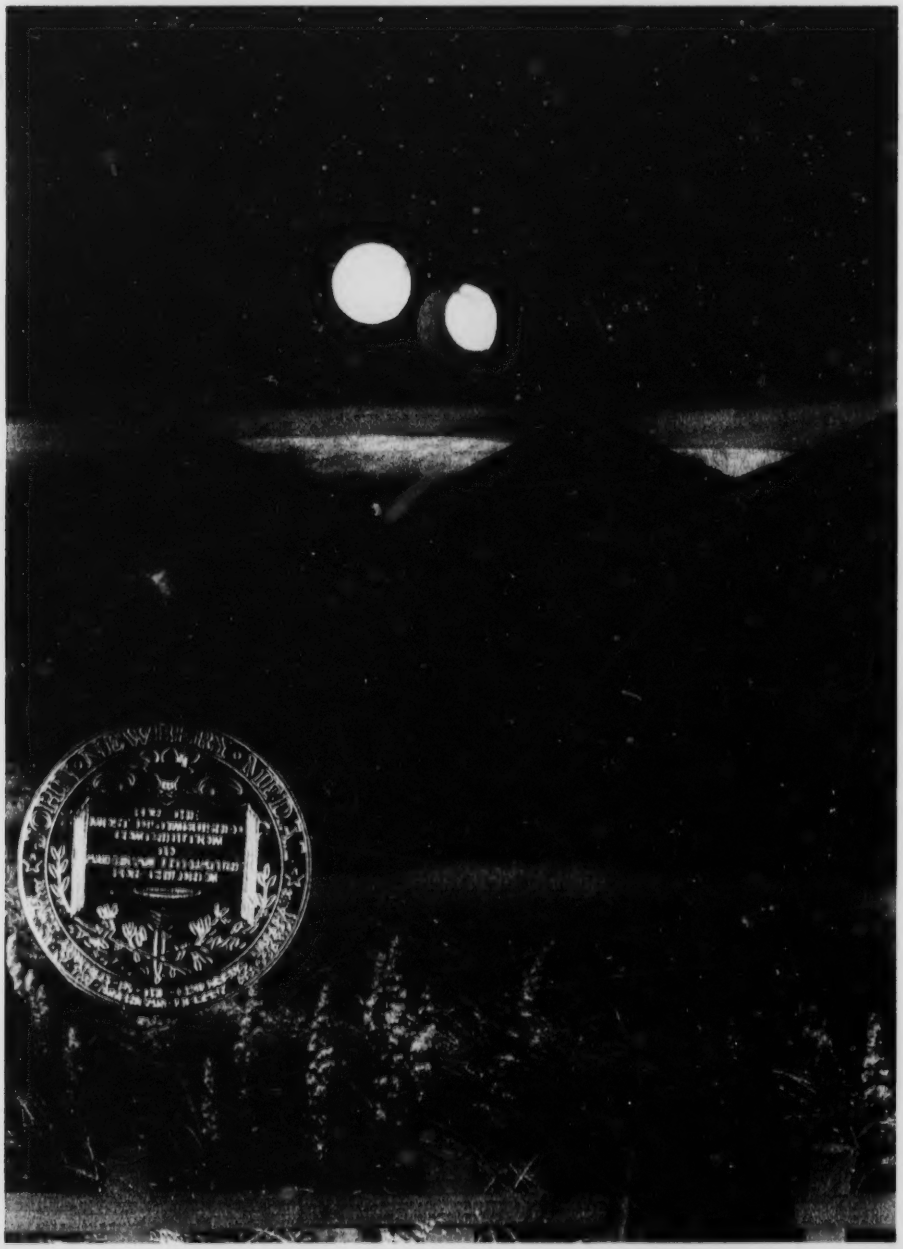


In 1986, Creech's father died, an event that inspired her to begin writing seriously. Her father had suffered a stroke in 1980 that made it impossible for him to move or speak. "Think of all those words locked up for six years, because his mind could neither accept nor deliver words," she later said. "A month after he died in 1986, I started my first novel, and when I finished it, I wrote another, and another, and another. The words rushed out. The connection between my father's death and my flood of writing might be that I had been confronted with the dark wall of mortality: we don't have endless time to follow our dream; but it might also be that I felt obligated to use the words that my father could not." Creech also had more time to write during this period, because her children had graduated from high school and gone away to college.

Creech wrote several of her first works for adults: *The Recital,* the story of an eccentric woman in a small town; *Nickel Malley,* the story of a young man's relationship with his neighbors; and *The Centre of the Universe,* a play that was produced off-Broadway. Her next book, *Absolutely Normal Chaos* (1990), was her first book for children. Since that time, Creech has continued to write novels for this audience, usually featuring young teenagers who are dealing with difficult issues about family life and personal identity. Yet she lightens such serious subjects with humor and sensitivity.

While *Absolutely Normal Chaos* turned out to be her first novel for young adults, Creech didn't have any specific audience in mind when she wrote it, as she explains here. "When I wrote *Absolutely Normal Chaos* I didn't know it was a children's book. I'd written two adult novels prior to that, but in that book the girl just happened to be younger. My agent said it might appeal to a children's market." Her agent was right.

Based on the author's own childhood experiences, *Absolutely Normal Chaos* is the summer journal of Mary Lou Finney, a 13-year-old growing



up in Ohio. She begins the journal as an assignment for English class, not expecting anything interesting to happen. But it turns out to be a momentous summer for Mary Lou, one that includes her first boyfriend, her first kiss, and many lessons about friends, family, and herself. It's a funny and heartfelt story about the early teen years. *Absolutely Normal Chaos* was

first published in England in 1990, although it wasn't published in the United States until 1995. But by that time, Creech had already become renowned for her next work, the award-winning novel *Walk Two Moons*.

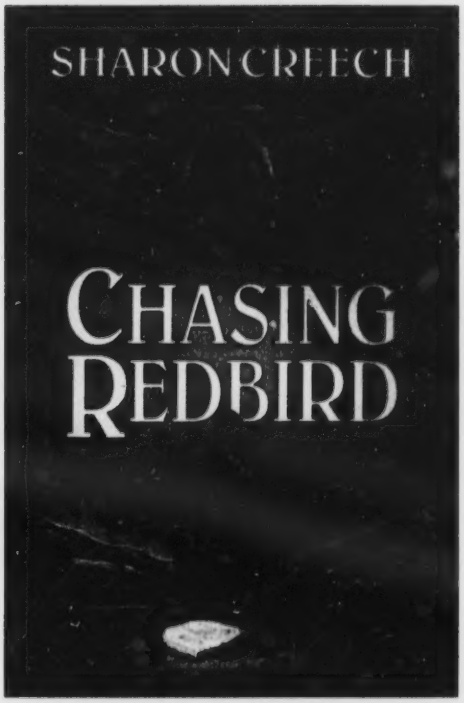
Walk Two Moons

Creech's career as a writer took off with the 1994 publication of her second novel for children, *Walk Two Moons*, which draws upon her childhood love of nature and her lifelong interest in Native American themes. Creech had a very difficult time writing the book. She wrote and repeatedly revised two different versions, but neither satisfied her. Then, while eating in a Chinese restaurant one day, she broke open her fortune cookie. Her message said, "Don't judge a man until you've walked two moons in his moccasins," with a note that said "American Indian proverb." Inspired by the message and recalling the moccasins she had received as a young girl, she revised the novel yet again. Through the revision process the novel evolved, as Creech explains, "from a simple humorous tale of the Finney family, to the story of repressed Phoebe Winterbottom, and finally, in a third or fourth version, to the story of Salamanca Tree Hiddle, of Native American ancestry, who sets out from Ohio with her grandparents to visit her mother in Idaho."

In the final, published version of *Walk Two Moons*, 13-year-old Salamanca (Sal) Tree Hiddle travels with her grandparents to Idaho to visit her mother, who abandoned Sal when she was a small child. Sal, who is part Native American, enjoys the trip because it gives her a chance to explore her Indian heritage. While making this journey, which recalls Creech's own childhood trip to Idaho, Sal also tells a story about her friend Phoebe, whose mother has left town abruptly. Sal and the other children in the book have to deal with very serious issues. In the end, while learning valuable lessons about herself, Sal also gains wisdom and understanding about her mother's reasons for leaving.

Creech has talked about how much she has in common with the character of Sal. When Creech was writing *Walk Two Moons*, her children had moved back to the United States to attend college, and she missed them. As she explains, "When I read Salamanca's story now, with some distance, I hear such longing in her voice—for her mother, for her father, for the land—and I know that her longing is also my longing. I know this book was also written because I was living an ocean away, longing for my children, my larger family, and for my own country."

In a 1995 speech, Creech revealed some of the sources for the novel. One was the fortune cookie with the advice "Don't judge a man until you've



walked two moons in his moccasins." That proverb, she said, revived the thoughts and feelings she had had as a young girl. In fact, much of the inspiration for the novel came from her childhood, like the Native American myths and legends, the love of climbing trees, and the car journey she took at age 12 from Ohio to Idaho. Recent events, she said, influenced her as well. While writing the book, she often wandered to a bank of trees on the TASIS campus, where she would ponder the trees and the clouds in the sky overhead. "[Increasingly,] I felt that my father was inhabiting those clouds. . . . One day I heard a magnificent birdsong coming from the top of the tree, and it seemed that the tree itself was singing. Instantly, I had the further sense that my father had leaped from the clouds to the tree."

An Award Changes Her Life

In 1995, *Walk Two Moons* won the Newbery Medal, which is considered one of the most prestigious awards in children's literature. The Newbery Medal is awarded each year by the American Library Association for the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children. "The book is packed with humor and affection," the Newbery selection committee said, "and is an odyssey of unexpected twists and surprising conclusions." Because her first novel, *Absolutely Normal Chaos*, had been published only in England at that point, *Walk Two Moons* was the first of Creech's books to be published in the United States. So she was an unknown author when she received the Newbery, which caused quite a sensation.

Creech herself had no idea she had even been nominated for the Newbery, so she was stunned to receive the call that she had won. On the morning of the call she was frustrated with her writing, after struggling with a difficult passage in the book she was working on at the time. The call changed her mood and her life. At the time, she said, "I'm stunned

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and numb and amazingly honored." She later described her reaction to the call this way: "I still go weak when I think of that call coming so unexpectedly, jolting my world so intensely. My first reaction was disbelief, followed by overwhelming gratitude. I felt as if the eye of God had beamed down on me, and I'd better do everything I was told."

The Newbery Medal has an enormous impact on the reputation of the book, and it typically guarantees a large increase in sales. The Newbery also has an enormous impact on the life of the author, bringing immediate fame and attention. The author becomes an overnight celebrity, with an appearance on the "Today" show and invitations to speak all over the country. That was Creech's experience, as she suggests here in her advice for future Newbery winners: "Take a deep breath. You will have about 30 minutes between the call announcing your book is the winner and the onslaught of complete chaos. . . . You won't know what hit you, but get ready: you're going on the ride of your life." For Creech, the award gave her the opportunity to take several years off teaching and devote herself full-time to her writing.

"A month after [my father] died in 1986, I started my first novel, and when I finished it, I wrote another, and another, and another. The words rushed out. The connection between my father's death and my flood of writing might be that I had been confronted with the dark wall of mortality: we don't have endless time to follow our dream; but it might also be that I felt obligated to use the words that my father could not."

Later Writings

Creech's next book, *Pleasing the Ghost* (1996), features nine-year-old Dennis, whose father has recently died. Dennis explains how various ghosts keep visiting him in the night—"a constant parade of ghosts, but never the one I really want." One of these ghosts is his Uncle Arvie. Before his death, Arvie hid gifts around the house for his wife to find after he was gone. Now, he wants Dennis to help Arvie's widow find these gifts. Because Arvie suffered a stroke before he died, however, he tends to get his words mixed up. Thus, Dennis has to decipher Arvie's sentences to try to figure out what he's really trying to say. The book was considered a sensitive, funny, and engaging story about emotional loss.

In 1997, Creech published *Chasing Redbird,* about 13-year-old Zinnia Taylor and her efforts to understand and accept the death of her Aunt Jessie. Zinny feels guilty, in part because she fears that a prank she pulled may have caused Aunt Jessie's death. One day, while playing near her house, Zinny discovers an old trail once used by Native Americans and trappers. She embarks on the long process of trying to removes weeds and bushes from the old path. In so doing, she learns valuable lessons about her ancestors and herself, and she comes to terms with the death of her aunt. Like *Walk Two Moons,* with which it is often compared, *Chasing Redbird* contains a metaphorical journey of self-discovery that readers find intriguing, delightful, and touching.

In her most recent novel, *Bloomability* (1998), Creech combines first-person narrative and dream flashes to tell the story of 13-year-old Domenica Santolina Doone. Dinnie, as she's called, is in a tough family situation. The family has moved around a lot, and Dinnie has lived in 12 different cities. Currently, her father is on the road, her older brother is in jail, and her 16-year-old sister is about to have a baby. So her aunt and uncle take her from her most recent home to the American School in Lugano, Switzerland, where they work. There, Dinnie makes new friends who help her to see a sense of "bloomability," or possibility, and Dinnie's own gradual blossoming is detailed throughout the novel. *Bloomability* has been praised for its lively and sympathetic characters, but it has also been criticized for its lack of insight into their motivations and deeper feelings.

"Read a lot. Read anything and everything you want to read. All of that will fall into sort of a well that you will use when you write a story. Then write anything you want to. Write poetry, drama, science fiction, or humor. That way you will find out what really interests you."

With her writing career now well established, Creech has fulfilled her childhood dream to create stories. She has even said that her accomplishments have exceeded her dreams. In her Newbery Medal acceptance speech, she tried to explain her reaction to winning the award: "I'll be honest: I never dreamed a dream this big."

ADVICE TO YOUNG WRITERS

Creech offers this advice to aspiring writers: "Read a lot. Read anything and everything you want to read. All of that will fall into sort of a well that you will use when you write a story. Then write anything you want to.

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Write poetry, drama, science fiction, or humor. That way you will find out what really interests you."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Creech has been married twice. Little is known about her first husband, except that the marriage and the divorce took place before 1979 and that she has two children from that marriage, Rob and Karin. Creech's second husband was Lyle D. Rigg, who at the time was assistant headmaster of the English branch of The American School in Switzerland. Creech and Rigg met in 1979, on her first day in England, when he loaned her some ice. The pair formed a friendship, and they were married in 1981. Currently, Creech and Rigg spend their school years in Surrey, England, where TASIS is located, and their summers on Chautauqua Lake in New York. There, they are able to visit Creech's two children, who are now grown, as well as the rest of her family.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

In an essay in *Horn Book* magazine, Lyle Rigg discussed the things that are important to his wife: "our children, all her Creech family (even if and when they create 'absolutely normal chaos'), reading, trees, summers at our cottage on Chautauqua Lake, theater, sunshine, bookstores, canoeing, naps, fish sandwiches at Grace's Restaurant in Mayville, New York, and, of course, her writing."

WRITINGS

Absolutely Normal Chaos, 1990 (first published in England; published in the United States in 1995)
Walk Two Moons, 1994
Pleasing the Ghost, 1996
Chasing Redbird, 1997
Bloomability, 1998

HONORS AND AWARDS

Best Book (*School Library Journal*): 1994, for *Walk Two Moons*
Newbery Medal (American Library Association): 1995, for *Walk Two Moons*
Notable Children's Book (American Library Association): 1995, for *Walk Two Moons*

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Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Vol. 21, 1997
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ADDRESS

HarperCollins Children's Books
10 East 53nd Street
New York, NY 10022-5244

WORLD WIDE WEB SITES

http://www.harperchildrens.com
http://www.ala.org/alsc/creech.html

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Michael Crichton 1942-

American Novelist, Screenwriter, and Film Director
Author of *The Andromeda Strain, Sphere, Jurassic Park, The Lost World,* and *Twister*
Creator and Executive Producer of the Television Series "ER"

BIRTH

John Michael Crichton (pronounced CRY-ton; rhymes with frighten) was born on October 23, 1942, in Chicago, Illinois. He was the eldest of four children born to John Henderson Crichton, who was a journalist and became the editor of

Advertising Age (the trade journal of the advertising industry), and Zula (Miller) Crichton, who was a homemaker. He had two sisters, Kimberly and Catherine, and one brother, Douglas. When Michael was six years old, his family moved to Roslyn, Long Island, a suburb of New York City.

YOUTH

Crichton was raised as part of a wealthy, well-educated family. His parents encouraged him to develop a wide range of interests and skills by taking him and his siblings to museums, plays, concerts, and movies on a weekly basis. "It was an idea in my family that it was good to have an interest in many diverse things—that you didn't have to have a scheme whereby it all fit together," he noted. "My parents were very inclined not to set limits on the exploration of their children. They were always saying, 'You can do that.' So I never had the feeling there was some area that I was incompetent in." As a boy, Crichton's favorite activities were reading and going to the movies. He especially liked to read the spooky stories of Edgar Allan Poe and the mysteries of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and to watch suspenseful movies directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

The area where Crichton spent his youth was a prime location for writers. "I grew up on Long Island in a place nicknamed 'Media Town' because so many media people lived there," he explained. "People from advertising agencies, newspapers, magazines—it was that kind of environment." As a result, Crichton became interested in writing at an early age. "I always considered writing a very natural occupation, something that I knew how to do. That does not mean that I was very good right away, but I began when I was very young," he recalled. "When I was nine, my third-grade class was told to write a puppet show. Most of the students wrote brief skits; I wrote a nine-page epic involving so many characters that I had to get my father to retype it for me with multiple carbon copies before it could be performed."

When he was just 14 years old, Crichton wrote an article that was published in the travel section of the *New York Times*. "What happened was that, on a summer trip, my family visited Sunset Crater National Monument, in Arizona. I found this place fascinating, but there was nobody else around that day, and I suspected most tourists bypassed it, not realizing how interesting it really was," he stated. His parents then suggested that he write an article about it. So Crichton collected some pamphlets and interviewed a park ranger. When he got home, he typed up an article and submitted it to the *New York Times*. It was accepted by the newspaper's travel editor, who happened to be the Crichtons' neighbor. "I was ecstatic.

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I was a published writer!" Crichton recalled. "I thought I had sneaked past the system, and had done a grown-up thing, and it gave me tremendous encouragement to continue writing. After all, I had been paid $60, which in those days was a lot of money for a kid."

Thanks in part to their father's career as a journalist, all the Crichton children had a strong literary orientation. "At the dinner table there was always talk about writing, and correct word use, with frequent pauses to consult Fowler's *Modern English Usage* when arguments arose," Crichton remembered. Their father also insisted that the children learn to type at an early age. "My father unquestionably influenced my interest in writing; he was a born storyteller," Crichton noted. "At bedtime we insisted that he tell us stories, which he would illustrate on the spot with little comic-strip drawings until we slowly drifted off to sleep." Despite the influence his father had on his future career, however, Crichton was never particularly close to him. "My father and I had not had an easy time together," he stated. "We had never been the classic boy and his dad."

"I have a theory that writers are people who learn early to handle their emotions and frustrations by writing things out, instead of killing people or punching bags or kicking walls. . . . Beginning around age 13, I would descend to the basement and write up a storm, millions upon millions of painful adolescent words, a torrent of garbage which has, mercifully, never been published."

The difficult relationship with his father was not the only unhappy aspect of Crichton's youth. He was extremely tall, thin, and awkward as a teenager, which sometimes made it hard for him to relate to people his own age. "I was a freak. My family used to make jokes about getting me heavy shoes so I wouldn't blow over. I was doomed. Obviously I would never get a date," he said. But, in some ways, Crichton's troubled teen years helped him to develop his skills as a writer. "I have a theory that writers are people who learn early to handle their emotions and frustrations by writing things out, instead of killing people or punching bags or kicking walls. I happened to learn that," he noted. "Beginning around age 13, I would descend to the basement and write up a storm, millions upon millions of painful adolescent words, a torrent of garbage which has, mercifully, never been published." Crichton recalled that most of his writing in those days concerned "relationships turning out badly, bad dating ex-

periences, people not going out with you, unrequited love, that's what I knew — the story of my life at the time."

EDUCATION

Crichton was a straight-A student at Roslyn High School. He also participated in a variety of extracurricular activities. For example, he reported on high school sports for the local newspaper, acted as vice president of the student government, and was a member of the rocket club. Despite his accomplishments, however, Crichton still felt self-conscious because of his height, which had reached six feet, nine inches by the time he was in high school. Although he was not a natural athlete, he worked very hard and became a star on the Roslyn High basketball team. He once said that he played basketball mainly because "I wanted to be kissed by the cheerleaders." But he ended up being named the team's most valuable player his senior year, as well as setting school records for most rebounds in a game, highest rebounding average per game, and best field goal shooting percentage in a season.

"Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the writing became more interesting to me than the medicine. And as my writing got more successful, the conflict between writing and medicine became increasingly awkward."

Upon graduating from high school in 1960, Crichton was accepted to Harvard University. He played on the school's basketball team for one year, but "week after week you'd lose, and it wasn't for me," he stated. He also wrote book and movie reviews for the student newspaper. Since he had always been interested in writing, Crichton started out as an English major at Harvard. "I had gone to college planning to become a writer, but early on a scientific tendency appeared. In the English department at Harvard, my writing style was severely criticized and I was receiving grades of C or C+ on my papers. At 18, I was vain about my writing and felt it was Harvard, and not I, that was in error," he recalled. To prove that he was being judged unfairly by his professors, Crichton submitted an essay by the famous author George Orwell in response to an assignment to write a paper about *Gulliver's Travels*. To make sure that he would not be expelled for plagiarism, he told his student advisor about his plan first. The professor never realized that Crichton had not written the paper himself and gave it a poor grade.

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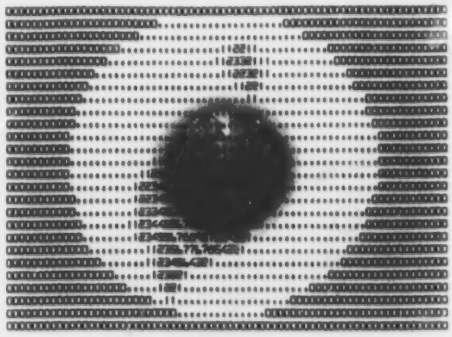
"George Orwell got a B- at Harvard," Crichton noted. "Now Orwell was a wonderful writer, and if a B- was all he could get, I thought I'd better drop English as my major."



Crichton then switched his major to anthropology, which he described as "sort of human biology (a little) and bones (a lot)." He also took enough advanced science courses to qualify for graduate study in medicine. But he soon grew disgusted with the attitude of his fellow students in the pre-medical courses. "In general, I found Harvard an exciting place, where people were genuinely focused on study and learning, and with no special emphasis on grades. But to take a pre-med course was to step into a different world — nasty and competitive," he remembered. "In the labs, if you asked the person at the next bench a question, he'd tell you the wrong answer in the hope that you would make a mistake or, even better, start a fire. We were marked down for starting fires. In my year, I had the dubious distinction of starting more lab fires than anyone else, including a spectacular ether fire that set the ceiling aflame and left large scorch marks." Despite his difficulties in the laboratory, Crichton earned his bachelor's degree in anthropology summa cum laude (with highest distinction) in 1964.

Upon graduating from Harvard, Crichton received a one-year fellowship to teach anthropology and conduct research at Cambridge University in England. While there, he read a spy novel called *The Ipcress File* by author Len Deighton. The book impressed him so much that he decided to try writing his own scientific thrillers. "A lot of [my book *The Andromeda Strain*] is traceable to *Ipcress*," Crichton noted, "in terms of trying to create an imaginary world using recognizable techniques and real people." When he returned to Harvard in 1966 to attend medical school, Crichton began writing books to help pay his tuition. He published his first book, *Odds On*, under the pseudonym John Lange that year. He published four more novels over the next few years, all under pseudonyms. "I wrote paperback thrillers to pay my bills," he recalled. "Of course, there wasn't much time for writing, but I did it on weekends and vacations. And with

practice, I learned to write these spy thrillers quickly." Crichton completed his medical degree (M.D.) in 1969.

CHOOSING A CAREER

As the time neared for Crichton to graduate from Harvard Medical School, he began to doubt his decision to become a doctor. For one thing, he found that he had too much imagination for medicine. "I often listened to patients, thinking, How can I use this in a book? And sometimes when I heard the symptoms of their disease, I'd think, It's obviously anemia, but can I imagine a new disease that would present with these same symptoms?" he admitted. "Of course, when you go to a doctor, you don't want him to view you as a book chapter, and you don't want him making up fictional diseases to explain your case of anemia. I was clear on that. I understood that I was not behaving like a doctor that *I* would want to consult."

At about the same time that he was finishing medical school, Crichton published his first book under his own name, *The Andromeda Strain* (1969). It tells the story of deadly extraterrestrial microbe called Andromeda that is accidentally brought back to earth by a NASA space probe. After the microbe kills all but two of the inhabitants of a Nevada town, a team of scientists is dispatched to a top-secret underground military base in the desert to find an antidote. The scientists must race to stop the virus before it wipes out the world's population. Crichton added realistic details — like computer printouts and footnotes to actual scientific papers — in order to make the story more believable. But despite its scientific emphasis, the book still had enough suspense and action to hook casual readers. As a result, *The Andromeda Strain* was a huge success and was soon optioned for the movies.

"Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the writing became more interesting to me than the medicine. And as my writing got more successful, the conflict between writing and medicine became increasingly awkward," Crichton explained. "At Harvard, in your clinical years, you were given grades according to the informal opinion of the people you worked with. If these people found out I was writing books, my grades would fall precipitously." The combination of his success as a writer and his lack of dedication to medicine finally convinced him to give up his career as a doctor. Although he finished his medical degree in 1969, Crichton never completed the other requirements to become licensed to practice medicine. "In quitting, I was following my instincts; I was doing what I really wanted to do," he explained. "But most people saw only that I was giving up a lot of prestige. In those days, the prestige of physicians was high. Polls ranked doc-

tors just below justices of the Supreme Court. To quit medicine to become a writer struck most people like quitting the Supreme Court to become a bail bondsman."

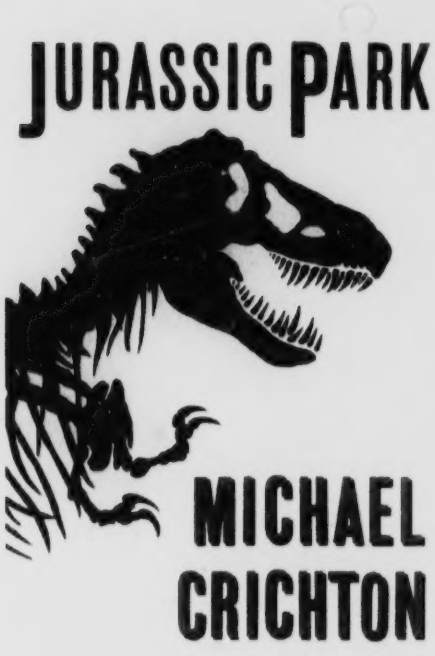
Following his decision to quit medicine, Crichton talked his advisors into letting him spend his final semester in a unique internship at Massachusetts General Hospital. Rather than working on patients himself, he followed the cases of several patients as a sort of doctor/journalist to examine the issues affecting their care. He published the results of his study in 1970 in a book called *Five Patients: The Hospital Explained,* which earned him the Medical Writer of the Year award from the Association of American Medical Writers. In 1970, Crichton moved to Los Angeles to become an author, screenwriter, and director, but he continued to apply his scientific knowledge to everything he wrote.

In quitting medicine to become an author, Crichton says, "I was following my instincts; I was doing what I really wanted to do. But most people saw only that I was giving up a lot of prestige. In those days, the prestige of physicians was high. Polls ranked doctors just below justices of the Supreme Court. To quit medicine to become a writer struck most people like quitting the Supreme Court to become a bail bondsman."

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

By applying realistic scientific details to his suspenseful fiction, Crichton became one of the first authors to write the type of books known as techno-thrillers. On the surface, his books are exciting page-turners that feature a roller-coaster ride of action and entertainment. These elements help his stories appeal to readers of all ages, including young adults. But within the fictional story line Crichton also includes a dose of information on science, history, technology, or current social issues. In this way, he is able to present difficult concepts in understandable terms and provide readers with a starting point for further study.

Crichton is often criticized for the lack of character development in his novels. But he is also praised for his ability to create suspense and to make readers believe that the events he describes could really happen. "What I enjoy doing is making up a world that convinces the reader it's



the real world," he noted. "When people ask me is it real, I generally say no, it didn't happen. Just assume that everything is not real." However, several of Crichton's books seem to have predicted actual scientific events that occurred a short time after they were published. For example, the Andromeda virus he wrote about in 1969 shares many characteristics of the modern AIDS virus. In addition, Crichton's 1980 novel *Congo* features a gorilla that communicates through sign language. A few years later, scientists announced that this feat had been accomplished by a real gorilla. And Crichton's 1990 best-seller *Jurassic Park* includes information on the cloning of dinosaurs from DNA, a procedure real scientists actually did with a sheep in 1997. "Every writer of fiction wants to be accepted as if he were creating a truth—a real situation, real characters," he stated. "It seems to me there is no major distinction between something that already exists and something that is possible—in our society, the possible becomes the real in very short order."

Best-Selling Novels and Blockbuster Movies

Shortly after moving to Los Angeles, Crichton wrote *The Terminal Man* (1972), which tells the story of a man who begins having severe epileptic seizures after he is injured in a traffic accident. In an attempt to help him, doctors surgically insert a device that gives an electric shock to his brain whenever he is about to have a seizure. But the device begins shocking him at random and causes all sorts of violent behavior. As the man begins killing people, the doctors try desperately to track him down. In 1972, after watching *The Andromeda Strain* and *The Terminal Man* be turned into movies, Crichton became interested in becoming a film director. His first directorial effort was the TV movie *Pursuit*, which was based upon a novel called *Binary* that he had written under the pseudonym John Lange.

In the mid-1970s, Crichton divided his time between writing novels and screenplays and directing films. He handled both the book and movie

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versions of his next two works. *Westworld,* published in 1974, is a story about a futuristic theme park where wealthy tourists can live out their fantasies with the help of androids. For example, a tourist can become a gunfighter in the Old West or a king in medieval Europe. But technology again causes problems, as the androids reject their programming and begin terrorizing the guests. *The Great Train Robbery,* published in 1975, is a historical novel about a high-class professional thief and his attempts to rob a train. In this book, Crichton incorporates historical facts about the Victorian era into a suspenseful crime story. The movie version starred Sean Connery as the thief.

With *Congo,* published in 1980, Crichton returned to his successful techno-thriller format. This novel concerns a group of treasure hunters who travel through the rain forests of Africa in search of special diamonds that will revolutionize computer technology. Because of their potential use in advanced weapons, the diamonds could enable whoever finds them to rule the world. In order to ensure their safe passage through a group of killer apes that guard the diamonds, the treasure hunters are accompanied by Amy, a gorilla who is able to communicate using sign language. *Congo* attracted a large audience of young adult readers and was eventually made into a movie in 1995.

> ***"I always have movies in mind when I write. I don't know how other authors write, but I gather not everyone sees his books being acted out as he sits at the typewriter. I do. I see it right up there on the screen, with the angles and closeups and the works."***

In the early 1980s, Crichton suffered a creative block that prevented him from working for several years. "For three years there were no books, and no films for four years. I read and I traveled," he recalled. He ended up going to remote areas of the world and having all sorts of adventures—from swimming in shark-infested waters off Tahiti to climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro in Africa. "Often I feel I go to some distant region of the world to be reminded of who I really am," he stated. "There is no mystery about why this should be so. Stripped of your ordinary surroundings, your friends, your daily routines, your refrigerator full of food, your closet full of your clothes—with all this taken away, you are forced into direct experience. Such direct experience inevitably makes you aware of who it is that is having the experience. That's not always comfortable, but it is always invigorating." Crichton later wrote an autobiographical book about his

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experiences, called *Travels,* that also features information about the spiritual journey he undertook around the same time, as well as stories about his years in medical school.

After conquering his writer's block, Crichton published a new novel, *Sphere,* in 1987. This book concerns a spaceship found at the bottom of the ocean. A team of scientists is sent to investigate using a submersible vehicle, but they encounter all kinds of problems and end up being stranded 1,000 feet below the surface. Just when they lose contact with the outside world, they begin receiving strange communications on their computer screens. *Sphere* was released as a movie in 1998.

Jurassic Park

In 1990, Crichton published his most successful book to date, *Jurassic Park.* It tells the story of an eccentric millionaire who clones dinosaurs and then creates a theme park on a tropical island so that modern-day visitors can see the genetically engineered beasts. When a team of experts come to the theme park as its first visitors, the dinosaurs escape the high-tech security system and begin running rampant on the island. *Jurassic Park,* which Crichton intended as a cautionary tale about cloning and the commercialization of biotechnology, became a best-seller upon its publication. In 1993, director Steven Spielberg turned it into a movie—complete with realistic dinosaurs and special effects—that broke all box-office records. Crichton, in fact, wrote the screenplay for the 1993 hit film with John Koepp. Regarding the successful translation of his books to film, Crichton commented: "I always have movies in mind when I write. I don't know how other authors write, but I gather not everyone sees his books being acted out as he sits at the typewriter. I do. I see it right up there on the screen, with the angles and closeups and the works." Crichton later wrote a sequel to *Jurassic Park* entitled *The Lost World* (1995), which was made into a movie in 1996.

Crichton followed *Jurassic Park* with two controversial novels, *Rising Sun* (1992) and *Disclosure* (1994). *Rising Sun* is a murder mystery that also deals with the dangers that Japanese economic strength could pose to American industry. It appeared at a time when many Americans were doubting the nation's ability to compete with the Japanese, and some reviewers said that the book had racist undertones. Many accused Crichton of bashing Japan to appeal to American resentments. *Disclosure,* a story about corruption in a computer company, also deals with the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace. But whereas most complaints about sexual harassment are made against men, Crichton turned the problem

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A scene from the 1996 film, The Lost World

upside-down by having a female character as the boss who harasses one of her employees and then claims that he has sexually harassed her. *Disclosure,* like *Rising Sun,* proved to be controversial. In fact, Crichton was criticized because sexual harassment cases almost always involve a man harassing a woman. Both *Rising Sun* and *Disclosure* were made into movies in the 1990s.

"ER"

In 1994, Crichton wrote a pilot for a new television series called "ER" about hospital emergency room physicians. The basic idea for the show had been floating around Hollywood for 20 years, in the form of a screenplay that Crichton wrote about his experiences as an intern at Massachusetts General Hospital. "Every network had seen it over the years, and they basically didn't like it," he stated. "The pace of TV has been artificially slowed. I wanted to crank it up to something resembling reality." The "ER" pilot featured many unconventional elements for TV, including a fast-moving camera, lots of technical medical language, the introduction of new characters every week, and no neat story lines. Nevertheless, the drama was extremely well-received by both viewers and critics. It was turned into a series, with Crichton as executive producer, and is still regularly the top-rated show on television. Crichton was very pleased by the success of "ER." "People in the entertainment business said, 'Viewers

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The main purpose in all of Crichton's work is to entertain people: "The reward's in telling stories. It's fun to manipulate people's feelings and to be manipulated."

won't understand this show.' Finally, there's a recognition that people are smart," he stated.

In 1996, Crichton was involved in two hit projects. He wrote *Airframe*, a novel about an airplane disaster on a flight from Hong Kong to Denver. Near California, the plane suddenly lurches into a series of uncontrollable dives. Three passengers are killed, over 50 are injured, and no one is sure just what caused the problems. Much of the novel recounts the investigation into the cause, an exciting sequence involving corrupt management at the manufacturer, shady airline officials, and union thugs. The novel has already been sold to film makers for an estimated $8 to $10 million. Crichton's other big project in 1996 was co-writing the screenplay for the film *Twister*, with his wife Anne-Marie Martin. This blockbuster hit film is about a soon-to-be-divorced couple, played by Bill Paxton and Helen Hunt, who are meteorologists. But they are also tornado buffs, and they travel around the country to chase the biggest storms around.

In 1998, Crichton announced that he was at work on a third Jurassic Park screenplay. The movie, slated to appear in the summer of 2000, will once again be a collaboration between Crichton and Steven Spielberg. "I'm enormously pleased that after 65 million years, the fascination with dinosaurs seems here to stay and I'm delighted at this opportunity to collaborate again with Steven."

Crichton's success as a novelist, screenwriter, movie director, and television producer has made him a very wealthy man. In fact, he earned an estimated $102 million in 1997, making him one of the top-paid people in the entertainment industry. Nevertheless, he says that the main purpose in all of his work is to entertain people: "The reward's in telling stories. It's fun to manipulate people's feelings and to be manipulated." Based upon his own youth and educational background, Crichton emphasizes the importance of children developing a broad range of interests and skills. "Learn everything you can. Never assume you won't need certain information. The world is going to be radically different in ten years," he stated. "When I was in elementary school, there was no TV, no jet airplanes, no personal computers. All that came later. So don't be so sure about what you should and shouldn't have to learn."

HIS WRITING PROCESS

Crichton spends about 18 months working on each novel. "I'm not an everyday writer, and I never have been. I have continued a pattern of intermittent, very intense effort, and that's the way I still do it." Crichton likes to follow a strict routine. While writing a book he eats the same lunch every day: buckwheat noodles during *Rising Sun;* mashed potatoes, gravy, and an open-face turkey sandwich during *Congo;* tuna sandwiches on rye during *The Great Train Robbery.*

Here is how Crichton describes his writing process. "I start with a fairly well worked out plan that has been percolating for some while, maybe five years. I turn things over. I solve a lot of problems far in advance. I don't usually refer to anything; I've done all the research and reading in advance. The first draft takes six to 10 weeks, working seven days. I first wake up at 6 o'clock in the morning. Then it's 5:30, then 5. It keeps moving back. After a month of work, it will start to be uncomfortable. It becomes earlier than 4 o'clock and eventually 2. And I begin to feel sleep deprived. I either finish the draft or I have to stop."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Crichton has been married four times. He married his first wife, Joan Radam, in 1965, shortly after he began medical school. They were divorced in 1970. Of his first marriage, Crichton says, "after five years together as students, she wanted to start a family and I wanted to pursue my career in books and movies." He married his second wife, lawyer Kathleen St. Johns, in 1978, but the marriage ended in divorce two years later. His third marriage, to broadcast journalist Suzanne Childs, also ended in divorce. "You may think that you are a swell and admirable person, but how many times do you have to get into a traffic accident before you wonder about your driving skills," he remarked of his failed marriages.

Crichton met actress Anne-Marie Martin in 1984 while he was directing the film *Runaway,* and they were married three years later. They now live in Santa Monica, California, with their daughter Taylor, who was born in 1988. "I think it's a privilege to be able to spend as much time with her as I can," Crichton said of his daughter. "I feel lucky when I have the time to cook dinner."

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

In addition to spending time with his family, Crichton's leisure activities include reading, going to the movies, playing tennis, hiking, and collecting art.

WRITINGS

Under Pseudonym John Lange

Odds On, 1966
Scratch One, 1966
Easy Go, 1968
Zero Cool, 1969
The Venom Business, 1969
Drug of Choice, 1970
Grave Descent, 1970
Binary, 1971

Under Pseudonym Jeffery Hudson

A Case of Need, 1968

Under Pseudonym Michael Douglas

Dealing; or, the Berkeley-to-Boston Forty-Brick Lost-Bag Blues, 1971 (with brother Douglas Crichton)

As Michael Crichton

The Andromeda Strain, 1969
Five Patients: The Hospital Explained, 1970
The Terminal Man, 1972
Westworld, 1974
The Great Train Robbery, 1975
Eaters of the Dead, 1976
Jasper Johns, 1977
Congo, 1980
Electronic Life: How to Think about Computers, 1983
Sphere, 1987
Travels, 1988
Jurassic Park, 1990
Rising Sun, 1992
Dinosaurs of Jurassic Park: An All-Aboard Reading Book, 1993
Raptor Attack: A Three-D Storybook, 1993
Disclosure, 1994
The Lost World, 1995
Airframe, 1996
Twister, 1996
Michael Crichton's Jurassic World, 1997

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Screenplays

Extreme Close-Up, 1973
Westworld, 1973
Coma, 1977 (based on a novel by Robin Cook)
The Great Train Robbery, 1978
Looker, 1981
Runaway, 1984
Jurassic Park, 1993 (with John Koepp)
Rising Sun, 1993 (with Philip Kaufman and Michael Backes)
ER, 1994 (television pilot)
Twister, 1996 (with Ann-Marie Martin)

HONORS AND AWARDS

Edgar Award (Mystery Writers of America): 1968, for *A Case of Need;* 1979, for *The Great Train Robbery*
Writer of the Year (Association of American Medical Writers): 1970, for *Five Patients: The Hospital Explained*
Academy Award for Scientific and Technical Achievement: 1995
Emmy Award: 1995, for "ER"
George Foster Peabody Award: 1995, for "ER"
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http://www.randomhouse.com/features/crichton

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Karen Cushman 1941-

American Writer of Historical Fiction for Young Adults
Newbery Award-Winning Author of *Catherine, Called Birdy, The Midwife's Apprentice,* and *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple*

BIRTH

Karen Cushman was born Karen Lipski in Chicago, Illinois, on October 4, 1941. Her parents, Arthur and Loretta Lipski, raised her and her brother in a working-class area of Chicago until she was 10. That year, the family moved to California.

YOUTH

Cushman remembers distinctly not liking her new home. "I was not thrilled with California," she says. "We lived in the San Fernando Valley, where it was always 100 degrees. My grandparents weren't there, or my dog or my school." Like the main character in her novel *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple,* Cushman had moved reluctantly. "Like me, Lucy was bookish and shy and a little stubborn and determined to be unhappy until she can get back home again," remembered Cushman. She especially missed her public library in Chicago, which used to be right around the corner, but in California she had to "wait until somebody could drive me to the library to get books."

Through the library and her own inclination, Cushman was an avid reader. And she read everything. Some of her favorite books when she was little were *Uncle Wiggly's Storybook, The Story of Ferdinand, Rufus M., Homer Price, Caddie Woodlawn, Blue Willow, Strawberry Girl,* the Bobbsey Twins books, and *Kristin Lavransdatter.* When she was older, she loved *Microbe Hunters, Triumph over Pain,* and *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich.* And she always loved comic books, especially those featuring Little Lulu and Donald Duck, as well as *Mad* magazine.

EDUCATION

Cushman attended Catholic schools in Chicago and California. She loved to write as a child. "At school, I had a recognized facility, so I was expected to produce a lot of things, to enter contests or to write a speech for someone." Her first piece was a play that she called a "plea for brotherhood, understanding and multiculturalism—I was obviously ahead of my time—called "Jingle Bagels." This first effort was "about Santa Claus going down the wrong chimney and landing in a Jewish house during Hanukkah." When she was 13, Cushman started "an epic poem cycle based on the life of Elvis. Some parts remain; some, alas, are lost to the world."

Although Cushman claimed she thought of herself as an easy-going student, "every once in a while I would dig my heels in and that would be the end of it." She knew she never wanted to be a secretary, so, in school, she refused to learn to type. In high school, some girls were selected to become part of a Sodality group, a charity group sponsored by the Catholic Church. Only members of the Sodality could hold school office. But "to be in the Sodality you had to promise all these things," Cushman recalled, including "that you would go to a Catholic college and never date a non-Catholic boy. I said 'I can't promise that. Someday I may want to date a non-Catholic'."

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The punishment for her defiance was harsh. "They took the editorship of the school paper away from me," Cushman said. As the student with the highest grade point average, she was named valedictorian. But "they took away my valedictory speech. I could write it. I just couldn't say it."

Her stubbornness paid off in the long run, though. Cushman won a full scholarship to Stanford University, one of the finest colleges in the country. She loved Stanford. It was her first introduction to people who "cared about some kind of life of the mind," she said. "The friends I made were exciting and eye-opening," she recalls. "Most exciting of all was the fact that one didn't have to graduate from college and go back home and get married and do dishes and laundry and make dinner and sandwiches and school lunches."

"Cushman and her husband were on vacation when, she recalls, "I woke up and I was making up this story, and I said, 'Listen to this, Phil. I have a great idea for a story.'" Philip Cushman, who had been listening to Karen outline ideas for books for years, gave her a challenge. As Karen recalls, "Phil said, 'I refuse to listen. I will read it if you write it down, but I won't listen.' So I stayed inside and wrote seven pages, an outline of what was to become Birdy. Once I wrote it down, I felt kind of committed."

But Cushman's college writing classes were a big disappointment. She says that her creative writing class "sent me screaming into the night looking for something else to do." She decided to take a double major in English and Greek. She hoped that course of study would lead to "digging for treasures on the Acropolis by moonlight." Instead, it led to some pretty uninspiring early jobs.

FIRST JOBS

After graduating from Stanford in 1963, Cushman got a job working in customer service for Pacific Telephone. "I was good at it," she remembers, "because I was intelligent and easy-going." But she quit that job and took work for a publisher writing advertising blurbs for children's books. She got promoted, then quit.

Her next job was a clerical position at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles. There, in 1968, she met her future husband, Philip Cushman, who was studying to be a rabbi.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Karen and Philip Cushman married on September 6, 1969. They moved to Portland, Oregon, and soon their daughter, Leah, was born. Philip had changed degree programs and worked at Lewis and Clark University as a psychology professor, while Karen stayed at home to raise Leah. She en-

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joyed her years at home, spending time with her daughter, weaving, and gardening.

BACK TO SCHOOL

After several years in Oregon, the Cushman family moved back to California, where Karen and Philip both went to graduate school. Karen went on to get two master's degrees, one in counseling from United States International University in 1977, and one in museum studies from John F. Kennedy University in 1986. For several years, she was Assistant Director of the Museum Studies Department at Kennedy. She taught classes in museum studies, including one in material culture, which is the study of everyday objects. She also did extensive study and research into the medieval era.

"I remember years ago I had these charts of kings and queens all over my walls," says Cushman. "I was reading a lot about medieval Europe and was interested in the music of the time. But every time I looked at academic programs in medieval history, I was turned off by their narrowness and by their focus, which was always on great events and great people and great movements. I was more interested in the ordinary. So I came to it through museums and material culture, the stuff of everyday life—what we can find out about ordinary people at another time."

Cushman had had ideas for books for years, but it was while listening to a speech about children's books that she dreamed up the idea for her first book, *Catherine, Called Birdy*. "The speaker said that writers of children's books should always empower the young reader by making the hero of the book the one to solve the problem: find what's lost, fix what's broken, solve the mystery, make everything right again."

Something in this didn't ring true to Cushman. "I thought that was all very well and good to say, but it's not very true to life. It doesn't happen that way for adults, much less children. What happens if you can't change whatever it is? All you can deal with is yourself."

BECOMING A WRITER

Cushman thought she had a terrific idea for a book. She and her husband were on vacation when, she recalls, "I woke up and I was making up this story, and I said, 'Listen to this, Phil. I have a great idea for a story.'" Philip Cushman, who had been listening to Karen outline ideas for books for years, gave her a challenge. As Karen recalls, "Phil said, 'I refuse to listen. I will read it if you write it down, but I won't listen.' So I stayed inside and

wrote seven pages, an outline of what was to become *Birdy*. Once I wrote it down, I felt kind of committed."

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

So, at 49, Karen Cushman began her career as a novelist.

Catherine, Called Birdy

Cushman's first book, *Catherine, Called Birdy* (1994), takes place in the year 1290. It tells the story of a year in the life of Catherine, nicknamed Birdy, who is 14. The novel is told in her own words, in the form of a diary. Birdy is the daughter of a knight, but her life is not that of a fairy tale princess. Her father is rough and can be cruel and abusive—he hits Birdy often. Birdy has three older brothers, none of whom she is close to and one of whom she despises. Her mother seems distant and preoccupied with a difficult pregnancy. Their home is a drafty, smelly place, where the only privacy is in the privy, or outhouse. Cushman tells Birdy's story in Birdy's words, from Birdy's point of view. She is being forced into a marriage with a crude old man, against her will. Cushman shows the turmoil within Birdy as she grapples with her own coming of age, and the role thrust upon her. There are moments of great sadness, but there is humor, too. Most of all, Cushman writes about a young girl with brains and courage, who is strong enough to defy the conventions of her age and learn about herself in the process.

Cushman wanted to focus on a real human being, not an idealized person in her novel. In her research, she wanted to uncover and tell about real life in the Middle Ages. "I wanted to know what they had for dinner, and where they went to the bathroom," she said. Her research led her to medieval books of manners, which instructed the people of the times in proper behavior. It told them not to wipe their noses on the tablecloths, how to share a wine cup with a neighbor at dinner, and how to sleep on a bed shared with strangers, all aspects of life known to people of the Middle Ages, and all retold in Birdy's diary.

Cushman was also interested in defining a child's place in the Middle Ages. "I wondered what the lot of children might have been in the Middle Ages when they had no power and little value," she said. As she researched the novel, a new insight into the era struck her. "It seemed to me that that time period was almost like adolescence, that western society was changing from a childhood to a young adulthood with more emphasis on manners and privacy and responsibility. Those ideas were new to that time, just the way they are new ideas for a child growing into adoles-

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cence." And in her adolescent narrator, Cushman teaches a truth about identity and personal freedom. At the end of the novel, Birdy realizes that: "I am who I am wherever I am." As Cushman explains, "The whole point of the book is that no matter how helpless we feel, we're always in charge of ourselves."

Cushman spent three years on the research and writing of *Catherine, Called Birdy*. She constantly wrote and rewrote the book, trying to get it just right. Now, when she speaks to school groups, she brings with her the 27 drafts of the first page of *Birdy*. "I read several of them so they can see why I had to go through so many drafts, because some of them were really terrible and boring."

When she was finally done with the book, Cushman faced the task of trying to get it published. At first, she was intimidated because of her age and inexperience. "People don't just start writing books at 50," she said. Some of the first people she talked to in children's publishing told her that young readers don't like historical fiction. She took the manuscript to a local California agent, who gave her advice. Then she sent the book to another agent, who found a publishing house, Clarion, who agreed to publish the book. Against all odds, when *Catherine, Called Birdy* appeared in 1994, it was a tremendous success, winning the first-time author a Newbery Honor award. Cushman, surprised and delighted by the book's success, said, "I'm a late bloomer. It takes some time, but I always bloom."

In writing* Birdy, *Cushman "wondered what the lot of children might have been in the Middle Ages when they had no power and little value. It seemed to me that that time period was almost like adolescence, that western society was changing from a childhood to a young adulthood with more emphasis on manners and privacy and responsibility. Those ideas were new to that time, just the way they are new ideas for a child growing into adolescence."

The Midwife's Apprentice

While she was finishing *Catherine, Called Birdy*, Cushman got the idea for her next book, *The Midwife's Apprentice* (1995). "I started a file for it," she says," and when I'd mailed off Birdy, and was nervously waiting to hear what would happen, I pulled out that file." The process was much less

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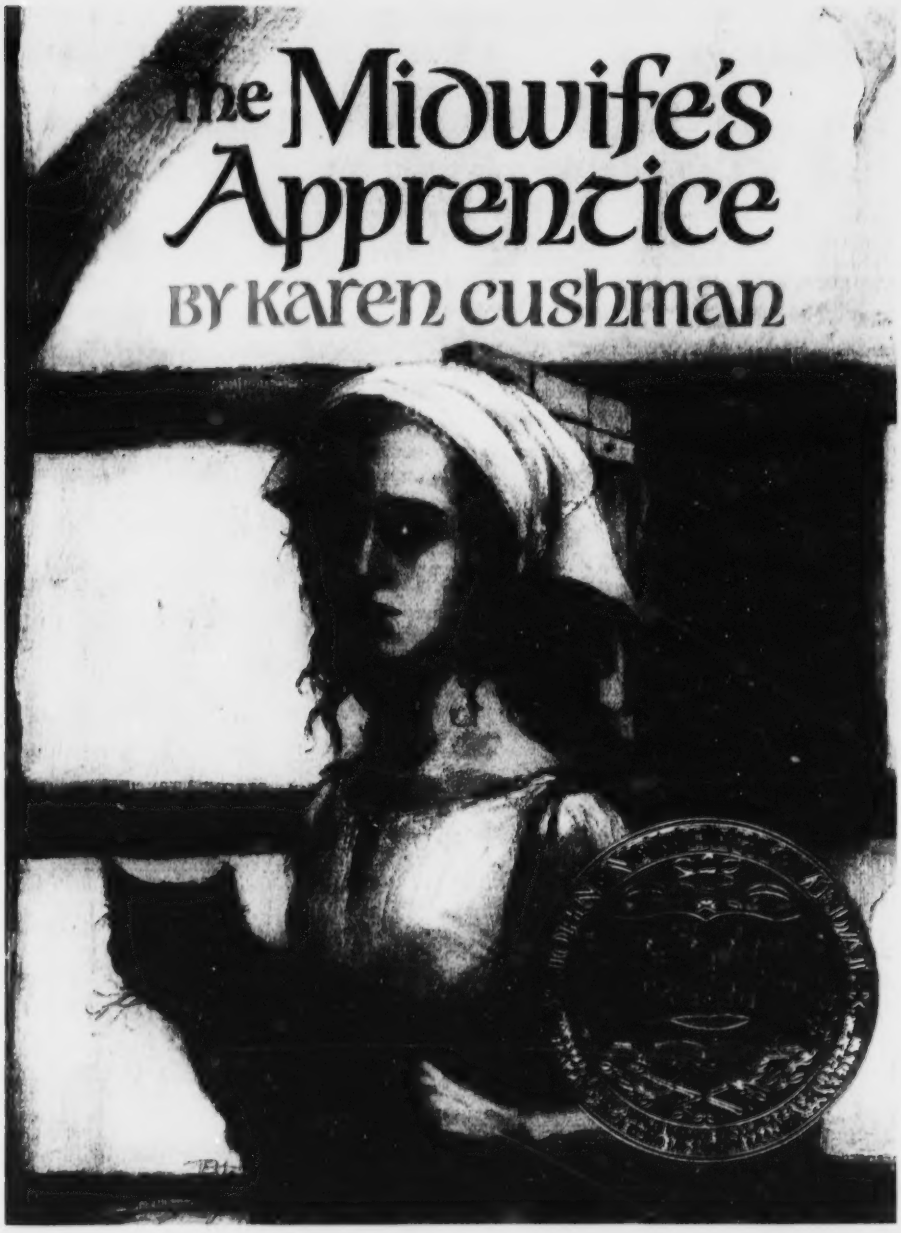

difficult the second time around, and Cushman completed the book in less than a year. "The book sort of poured out of me," is the way she described it.

Once again, the novel is set in the Middle Ages, at the same time as *Catherine, Called Birdy*. But the novel's main character is very different

from Birdy, in her origins and in the life she faces. As the novel opens, we see the character, homeless, nameless, and hungry, asleep on a dung heap. Even her age is unknown. She has lived on scraps of food, all alone, from her earliest memory. The people of the town call her "Brat," or "Beetle." She is found on the dung heap by the local midwife, who offers her food in exchange for work. The midwife is not a woman of charity; she only realizes that she can use the girl. Slowly, as the girl is able to meet the basic needs of life, gnawing hunger and a place to sleep are replaced with a small sense of who she is.

In the course of the *The Midwife's Apprentice*, Brat develops into "Alyce," a name the character gives herself. It is a novel of rebirth and becoming, and is centered on the role of the midwife—a woman who helps another woman give birth. While Cushman was writing the book, she didn't even realize that the book was full of symbols and metaphors of birth. When her husband read the manuscript and pointed that out to her, "I asked, where? When I noticed them, I polished them, made them a permanent part of the book." Once again, Cushman researched the era, and the language of the era for her book. "I wanted the language in *The Midwife's Apprentice* to be like singing. I read it aloud a lot. What made it easier was to write in an imagined long-ago cadence. I used the thesaurus and picked slightly odd words because I thought it would give it that kind of long-ago flavor."

She also investigated the concept of English place names. "I think that Alyce lived in a world that was all about place. Even people's names. Thomas At-the-Bridge or Robert Weaver, everything was all about their place, in the culture, in the society, or geographic place. And here was this child, without place. She wasn't willing to be just a placeless, nameless child; she wanted an identity and to belong. I think that's what I related to as I wrote her story. I never was homeless or hungry, but I could understand that search to know where I stand and who I am. Kids can relate to that."

Kids, and adults, too, related to and loved *The Midwife's Apprentice*. The book was an even greater success than *Catherine, Called Birdy* and won Cushman the Newbery Medal, the highest honor in children's literature. In accepting the award, Cushman said that "Alyce is every child who is parentless, homeless, and hungry, who lives on the edges of our world, who is mocked or excluded for being different."

"As children are what they eat and hear and experience," Cushman continued in her Newbery acceptance speech, "so too they are what they read. This is why I write what I do, about strong young women who in

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"As children are what they eat and hear and experience, so too they are what they read. This is why I write what I do, about strong young women who in one way or another take responsibility for their own lives; about tolerance, thoughtfulness, and caring; about choosing what is life-affirming and generous; about the ways that people are the same and the ways they are different and how rich that makes us all."

one way or another take responsibility for their own lives; about tolerance, thoughtfulness, and caring; about choosing what is life-affirming and generous; about the ways that people are the same and the ways they are different and how rich that makes us all."

The Ballad of Lucy Whipple

Cushman's next book, *The Ballad of Lucy Whipple* (1996), continues her themes of identity in a young adolescent girl, but in a very different time and place. The novel takes place in mid-nineteenth-century America, during the time of the Gold Rush. It tells the story of Lucy Whipple, born California Morning Whipple, the oldest of four children who have moved to California with their mother. Her father has recently died, and her mother, living out a cherished dream, has brought the family from the security of their New England home, with grandparents, school, library, and Lucy's beloved books, to live in the wilds of California, in search of the promised wealth of the Gold Rush.

When they arrive at Lucky Diggins, their new home, Lucy is miserable.

> "You said we'd find our fortunes, but I don't see any gold," she tells her mother. "Only rocks and holes and lizards."
>
> "Look around, California," Mama said. "Look at the color of the grass, the light trapped in the cracks of the mountains, the sun setting over the peaks. There's gold all around us if you just look."
>
> "Mama, I *am* looking. I'm looking for the school, the library, the *houses*. Mama, I want to go home."

Lucy spends the greater part of the novel plotting her escape back East. Yet during the story, she begins to find her place in her new world, despite the deprivations. The language of the novel is that of a 12-year-old girl, as

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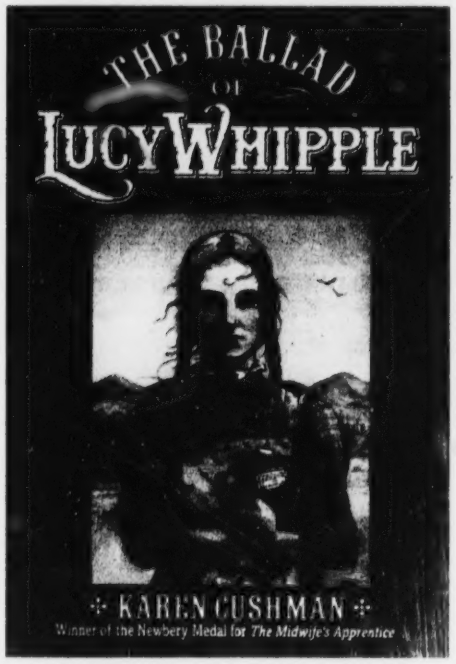

Lucy narrates the story and writes home about her new life to her grandparents in Massachusetts. "Dag diggity" begins creeping into her vocabulary, a saying she picks up from the miners who board in the boarding house made out of a tent her mother runs. "I am bodaciously sorrow-burdened and wretched," she writes to her grandparents.

The book, which begins in 1849, ends three years later, as Lucy reclaims her name and her home as California. Over the years, she has lost a brother and seen her mother fall in love and marry a man who moves the family to Hawaii. As the rest of the family leaves California, Lucy plans to return East. Yet at the last minute, she changes her mind, and her name. The new town leaders want her to be their librarian, and she jumps at the chance. In the final pages of the novel, framed as a letter to her mother, Lucy explains her change of heart. "The Massachusetts that is home is in my heart, not a town forty miles west of Boston. And I can take it with me wherever I go, but I can never go back there again. Seems to me home is where I am loved and safe and needed. And that's Lucky Diggins. Finally, Mama, Lucky Diggins is home and I'm not going anywhere after all." Lucy signs the letter "Miss California Morning Whipple, happy citizen and librarian of Lucky Diggins, California, U.S.A."

Cushman clearly remembers how the character of Lucy came to be. She was visiting the Oregon Historical Society and stopped in the book shop, "where I found many books about the Gold Rush. I read a statistic that stated that the California Gold Rush was a movement of men: 90% of the people who came to California looking for gold were men. That meant that 10% were not men. I got to thinking, 'Who were they? Why did they come?'" As in all her books, Cushman said her purpose in writing about Lucy was to have her readers "think about themselves and their place, and their lives. In this book, I'd like them to look at love, and home, and family. Also, I want readers to know about the importance—for generations—of books and reading."

Work in Progress

Cushman has completed her fourth novel, tentatively titled *Matilda Bone*, which is scheduled for publication in 1999. In it, she returns to the medieval era, this time focusing on a young girl who is an assistant to the only doctors of the era—"bloodletters and bonesetters, and barber surgeons," says the author. Cushman says that she began to think about a girl "who just wanted to be clean and quiet so she could get on with being holy and being a martyr or saint, and she winds up in the midst of blood and guts, the life-and-death issues, in the medical quarter of the medieval town." She says the books is about "the search for love and the importance of loving as well as being loved."

As in all her books, Cushman said her purpose in writing **The Ballad of Lucy Whipple** *was to have her readers "think about themselves and their place, and their lives. In this book, I'd like them to look at love, and home, and family. Also, I want readers to know about the importance—for generations—of books and reading."*

WHY SHE WRITES

In her Newbery acceptance speech for the *Midwife's Apprentice*, Cushman talked about why she writes. "Among a native Australian people, it is said, when the rice crop shows signs of failure, the women go into the rice field, bend down, and relate to it the history of its origins; the rice, now understanding why it is there, begins again to grow. . . . I don't start a book by thinking of the listener or the reader; I just climb inside a story and write it over and over again until I know what it's about. Then I try to write as clearly and honestly as I can. But when the book is finished and I hold it in my hands, I can see myself bending down to whisper it into the ear of a child. . . . And the child, now understanding, begins to grow. This is why I write—so children can begin to grow, to see beyond the edges of their own experience."

HOME LIFE

Karen Cushman is a full-time author now, and she loves the writer's life. In that same Newbery acceptance speech, she explained, "I write because it's something I can do at home barefoot; because I can lie on my bed and

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read and call it work; because I am always making up stories in my head anyway and I might as well make a living from them." She works out of a home office, with her beloved pets close by. Padraic, a foster dog, keeps company with two cats, Lobelia and Delphinium. Over the years, they have had "rats, hamsters, guinea pigs, birds, fish, a rabbit, about anything you can think of." Her current animals keep her company as she writes. "Lobelia is either lying on my lap or lying on the paper, you know the way cats do. Padraic's at my feet the whole time, so they do keep me company, and sometimes I even talk to them if I'm having a hard time."

And even though she is a now a successful and acclaimed writer, Cushman doesn't think she's changed. "I'm still the same person who has to empty the cat box and do the dishes, and it's strange to me that people are standing in line to have me sign my book." Still, she is enjoying her fame, and she especially enjoys the letters her many fans write to her. She answers every one.

FUTURE PLANS

Having found her true career at the age of 50, Cushman says she has enough ideas for years to come. "I am having a wonderful time. I like to write books for young adults, and I have a lot of ideas. I'd like to keep on doing this."

WRITINGS

Catherine, Called Birdy, 1994
The Midwife's Apprentice, 1995
The Ballad of Lucy Whipple, 1996

HONORS AND AWARDS

Golden Kite Award (Society of Children's Book Writers): 1994, for *Catherine, Called Birdy*
Best Book for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1995, for *Catherine, Called Birdy*; 1996, for *The Midwife's Apprentice*
Notable Children's Book (American Library Association): 1995, for *Catherine, Called Birdy*; 1996 for *The Midwife's Apprentice*
Best Books of the Year (*School Library Journal*): 1995
Books for Youth Editors' Choice (*Booklist*): 1996
Newbery Medal (American Library Association): 1996, for *The Midwife's Apprentice*

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FURTHER READING

Books

Seventh Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators, 1996
Something about the Author, Vol. 89, 1997
Who's Who in America, 1998

Periodicals

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Christian Science Monitor, Sep. 26, 1996, p.B2
Cricket, June 1997, p.42
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The Reading Teacher, Nov. 1996, p.198
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WORLD WIDE WEB SITE

http://www.hmco.com
http://www.eduplace.com/rdg/author/cushman/question.html
http://www.teachingk-8.com/archives/html/2_98outakes1.html
http://www.ce.org/topnews/cushman.htm

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Tomie dePaola 1934-

American Children's Author and Illustrator
Creator of *Strega Nona*

BIRTH

Tomie dePaola was born on September 15, 1934, in Meriden, Connecticut, to Joseph and Florence dePaola. His full name is Thomas Anthony dePaola, and he pronounces his name "Tommy de-POW-lah." When Tomie was growing up, Joe dePaola was a fireman and Florence was a homemaker. Tomie was the second of four kids, with older brother Joseph Jr., called Buddy, and younger sisters Maureen and Judie.

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The dePaolas were an Irish-Italian family, very proud of their ethnic heritage and very close to their extended families. Tomie's family background would later provide the inspiration for some of his finest children's books.

YOUTH

Young Tomie dePaola knew exactly what he wanted to do when he grew up, and at a very young age. "When I was four, I announced to my kindergarten teacher and to the world in general that when I grew up, I was going to write and draw pictures for books and dance and sing on the stage."

Throughout his early life, he loved to read and to draw. He remembers that he loved being read to by his mother. When the family was about to move into a house being built for them, he delightedly drew pictures on the plasterboard. "I was heartbroken when my drawings were covered up," he remembered years later.

"When I was four, I announced to my kindergarten teacher and to the world in general that when I grew up, I was going to write and draw pictures for books and dance and sing on the stage."

EDUCATION

DePaola went to elementary school at King Street School in Meriden. He had a first grade teacher whom he loved, but he remembers not caring much for "Dick and Jane," the boring, repetitive readers that children of several generation were forced to use to learn to read. In second grade, Tomie was overjoyed at the prospect of having his first art class. As he tells the story in one of his autobiographical books, *The Art Lesson*, he anticipated the arrival of the art teacher and the chance to show her his stuff. But, alas, the art teacher gave him one small piece of paper, and told him to draw using the school-issue box of waxy crayons, rather than his beautiful set of 64 Crayolas. And she told them to "copy" the drawings she had brought. Tomie was outraged. "Everyone knew that *real* artists didn't copy!" He refused to do the assignment. But his art teacher, who somehow understood the source of dePaola's indignation, didn't get mad. She made a deal with him. She allowed him to draw what he wished, with his own crayons, after he completed the regular assignment. He did so, delightedly.

As a grade schooler, Tomie also began to take dancing lessons and to sing in church and school choirs. He loved to perform, and throughout his life he has taken any opportunity to sing and dance in local musicals and school and church performances.

Living through World War II

A major world event took place during dePaola's grade school years. World War II, an international conflict that took place between 1939 and 1945, reached Tomie dePaola's home in December 1941. The dePaolas first heard about Pearl Harbor, the Japanese attack on the American fleet in Hawaii that began the U.S.'s involvement in the conflict, while listening to the radio. The family sat in horrified, stunned silence, listening to President Franklin D. Roosevelt tell them that their country was at war. The war years were a time of deprivation and personal loss. Food was rationed, and even bubble gum disappeared from grocer's shelves. The dePaolas lost family members, including Tomie's cousin Anthony. By 1945, the war was over, and dePaola shared in the rejoicing, hearing the church bells peal and running into the streets with all his neighbors to celebrate. His world was finally back to normal. "The war being over meant new cars, new bikes, new roller skates, sugar and butter, hamburgers, cigarettes, and along with Double Bubble, Wrigley's Spearmint Gum," he recalled.

After elementary school, dePaola attended Lincoln Junior High School. By now, his love of reading and art was firmly in place. So, too, was his dislike of math, and especially of gym. He hated gym, from grade school through college, and he still remembers the humiliation and discomfort of his gym classes.

DePaola remembers loving Meriden High School, where he was active in drama and music and worked as art editor of the yearbook. He did well enough in school that after graduation in 1951 he went on to Pratt Institute, a prestigious college of art and design in New York City, on a scholarship.

Art School

DePaola recalls his years at Pratt as "heaven on earth." He had wanted to be an artist all his life, and now he immersed himself in the world of art and New York. At Pratt, he studied "drawing, rendering, perspective, stylized drawing, use of nonrepresentational color, various painting techniques, and of medium." His teachers were devoted to helping each student develop their own gifts. When a fellow student asked, "When do we

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learn about style?" the teacher replied "We won't learn about style. Style happens naturally. If you keep on working, eventually the way you can and want to express yourself will surface. Meanwhile, do the assignments, listen to the critiques, don't miss your drawing classes, design classes, and, by all means, look at everything. Go to the galleries and the museums. Your own style will surface."

Tomie dePaola immersed himself in the world offered to him. He absorbed the atmosphere of creativity and learning around him, obeying a teacher who told him to "Observe. Observe everything around you. Observe what *you* are interested in." He also continued to take dancing and acting classes, performing in small ensembles in New York.

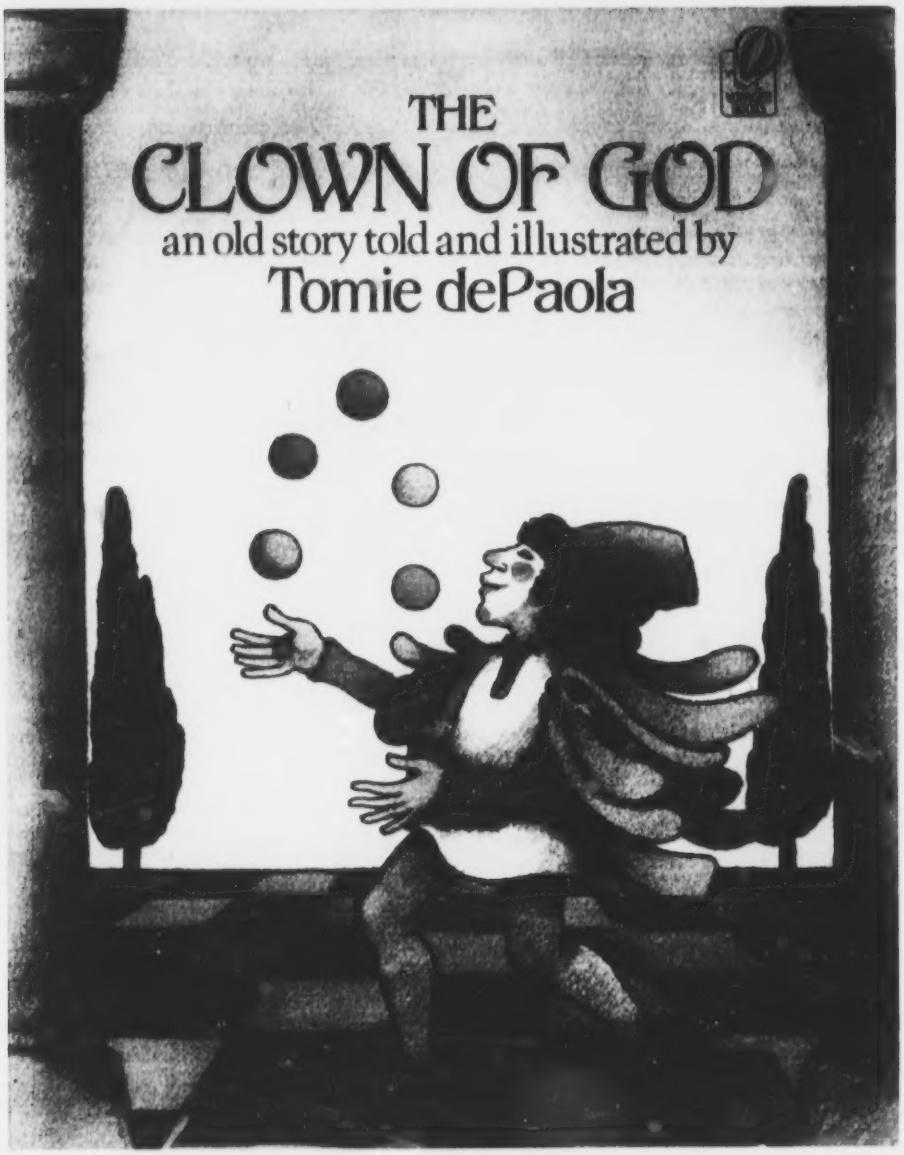
DePaola felt himself coming into his own in his years at Pratt. He feels his style, as it emerged in those years, is evident in the work he does to this day. Other great influences on his work, then and now, were the great masters of the pre-Renaissance, including Cimabue, Fra Angelico, Giotto, and Botticelli. He also learned about and fell in love with the folk art that continues to influence his work.

After graduating from Pratt in 1956, dePaola toured Europe, as a gift from his parents. He was finally able to see the great works of art that had made such an impression on him as a student. Returning to the U.S., dePaola decided to take a detour from his career plans in art. He entered a Benedictine monastery in Weston, Vermont. He explored whether he wanted the sheltered world of monastic life, or whether he wanted to pursue the world of art that had always been his dream. He left the monastery after six months, but continued to live in Vermont for the next several years.

STARTING TO WRITE AND DRAW FOR CHILDREN

DePaola explored many different artistic avenues over those years. He designed Christmas cards, worked on church murals, and taught art courses. Still active in the theater, he performed in plays and worked on scenery. He also continued to build his art portfolio, and he would travel to New York City several times a year to make the rounds of the publishers, hoping for an illustration assignment. "I hated it," he remembers. "I heard once, twice, a hundred times: 'Oh, I like your work; let me keep a couple of samples . . . the end."

Then he met an agent, Florence Alexander, who helped him get his first assignment. His first illustrations appeared in 1963 in a book entitled *Sound*, written by Bernice Kohn Hunt. After that, the books kept coming, "like the



other olives out of the bottle, once you pry out the first," says dePaola. In these early years, dePaola also continued to teach and to be active in thater, including developing children's theater projects in New England.

DePaola received his first assignment to write a book from an editor familiar with his drawings who asked, "Has Tomie got any manuscript ideas?" After a long lunch at New York City's celebrated Four Seasons restaurant with the editor, dePaola went home and seriously overwrote.

"The manuscript I churned out looked like *Gone with the Wind*," dePaola remembers, referring to the lengthy novel. Editor Mary Russell "mentioned tactfully that we should cut, so we worked on it and, with her help, I got it to fit." The first book he both wrote and illustrated, *The Wonderful Dragon of Timlin*, appeared in 1966.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Since the 1960s, Tomie dePaola has published more than 200 books for young readers. Nearly half of these are works he has written and illustrated; he has also contributed the illustrations to more than 100 books for other authors. The range of dePaola's work is broad: he has written fiction and nonfiction, all on a wide variety of topics. But his best-known work falls roughly into three categories: the autobiographical works, like *Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs*, retellings of old folk tales, including *The Clown of God* and *Strega Nona*, and his original works, featuring such favorites as his *Bill and Pete* titles.

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> ***"I'm 64 years old now, but I still remember being four years old. My great-grandmother was my very best friend when I was that little four-year-old boy [in* Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs*]. And everything in that story is 100 percent true, including seeing a falling star several nights after she died."***
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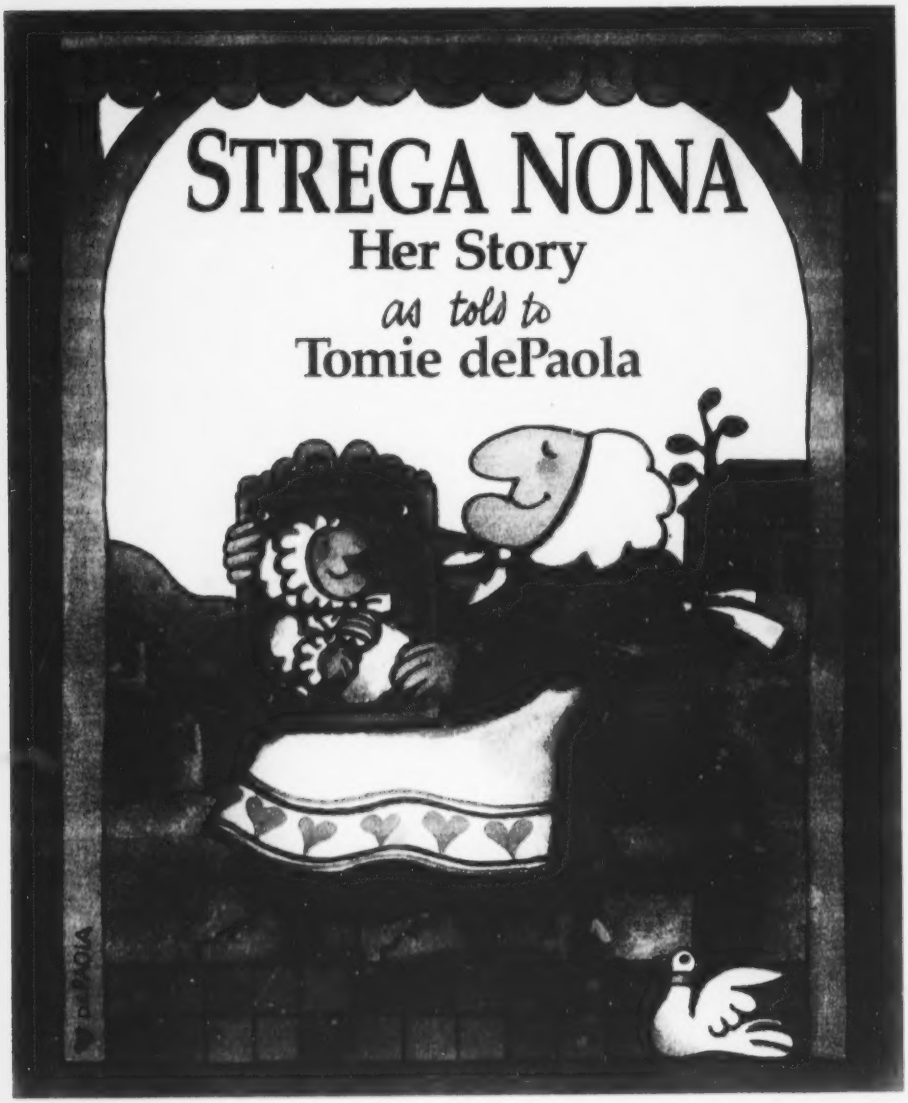
DePaola's writing career began in earnest in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this early period of creativity, he spent some time in California, where he studied for his master of fine arts at California College of Arts and Crafts. He also underwent psychotherapy for the first time. DePaola considers the experience "a real outside push. I was suddenly looking at my writing and making up my mind to be more honest." Part of this honesty was realizing that he "had shoved the child in me into a closet. I finally opened the door and let the child come out."

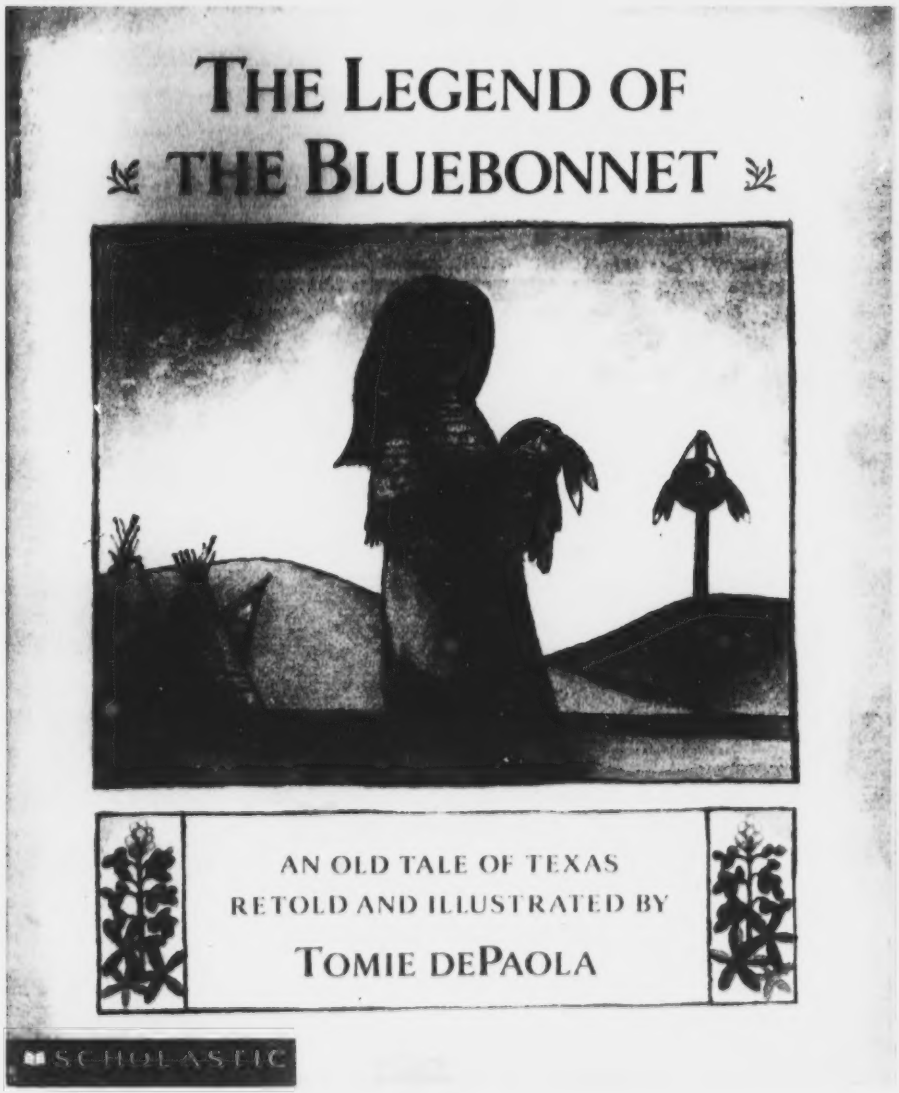
Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs

The result of this inner journey was one of his best-loved books, *Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs* (1973). The first of dePaola's books to deal with an autobiographical theme, it is based on his relationship with his grandmother and great-grandmother, who lived on two floors of the



same house ("upstairs" and "downstairs"). In addition to describing the love and sharing that takes place between the boy and his relatives, the book deals, in a frank but heartfelt manner, with the deaths of both beloved "nanas."

Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs was a turning point for dePaola. "The book was so well-received that it gave me the courage to actually look into my childhood," he said in an interview in 1998. DePaola is blessed with a wonderful memory. "I'm 64 years old now, but I still remember being four years old," he said in that interview. "My great-grandmother



was my very best friend when I was that little four-year-old boy. And everything in that story is 100 percent true, including seeing a falling star several nights after she died." The book is still read, and loved, by young readers, and it is even used in classes to help children deal with the grief of losing a loved one.

Other Autobiographical Works

DePaola's autobiographical titles include *Watch Out for the Chicken Feet in Your Soup* (1974) and *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* (1979). In *Watch Out for the*

Chicken Feet in Your Soup, the main character, Joey, is embarrassed about his ethnic background. His Italian grandmother uses his and his friend Eugene's coat to help raise bread dough and serves chicken soup with the feet left on. But Eugene is delighted with the grandmother and her ways. Together they make bread dolls, giving the best one to Joey, who stops pouting and learns a little lesson in love and friendship.

DePaola has called *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* "part two" of his autobiography, the follow-up to *Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs*. He says there's a lot of Oliver in him, and that one of the motivations for the book was that, while it was okay for girls to be tomboys, there wasn't the same option for boys to be sissies. He liked the idea of portraying a character like Oliver in a totally unsentimental way. "I would never hesitate to have a hero who is sometimes nasty or wrong," he says. "Olive Button has some negative qualities. One of them is that he's wishy-washy. He's even a little selfish. But kids—being human—are all those things and more."

"I would never hesitate to have a hero who is sometimes nasty or wrong. Oliver Button has some negative qualities. One of them is that he's wishy-washy. He's even a little selfish. But kids—being human—are all those things and more."

Folk Tales and Legends

DePaola's most popular and endearing character is the sturdy Strega Nona, star of several of his books. In her first appearance, in *Strega Nona* (1975), she is the central character in what is essentially a retelling of an old Italian folk tale known as "The Magic Cooking Pot." In this tale, Strega Nona, whose name means "Grandmother Witch," is able to control a magic pasta pot. Only she knows the secret commands that can make the pot start, and most importantly, stop producing noodles. When the helper Big Anthony tries his hand at magic, he can't stop the pot, and the town is soon full of pasta. The beloved Strega Nona has reappeared in later books, including *Strega Nona Meets Her Match* (193) and *Strega Nona: Her Story* (1996).

One of dePaola's most beautiful books is *The Clown of God* (1978), a retelling of an old Italian folk tale about a juggler who is born in poverty, rises to be the one of the most successful jugglers in Italy, then dies at the foot of a statue of Jesus and Mary, a worn out old man. At the time of his death, he is juggling for the baby Jesus, and after his death the statue

wears a smile, and is holding the most precious of the juggler's balls. In the book, dePaola's love for the pre-Renaissance art of Fra Angelico and Giotto is evident in the depiction of the buildings and even the perspective used in the illustrations. Careful readers will also appreciate the wide variety of people dePaola draws: there are all types of faces, skin color, round eyes and almond eyes, reflecting the different people of Italy.

Other dePaola retellings, like *The Legend of the Bluebonnet* (1983), reflect his love of folk tales of other cultures. In this book, set in a Native American tribe, dePaola tells the legend of how the bluebonnet came to be, through the help of a young girl. In his author's note, dePaola says that it is a tale "of the courage and sacrifice of a young person." He believes that children are indeed capable of feats of courage and strength. "I think they need to be encouraged, maybe even reminded that they do have that power and strength. I think that as they look inside, they know they have, but quite often grownups don't give them credit for it. And as a grownup, I want to give children the credit for everything I can: their courage, their humor, their love, their creative abilities, their abilities to be fair, their abilities to be unfair."

When preparing to create a new book: "Visual research is probably the most important step of all for me. The way I go about it is quite simple. I surround my studio with piles of art books that relate to the relevant period or place. Then comes the fun part. I look and look and look. Sometimes I'll sketch, but mostly I just 'observe'. . . . When I feel totally saturated with imagery, then, and only then, do I start my art."

Originals

Two of dePaola's favorite characters, Bill and Pete, appear in stories he created himself. In *Bill and Pete* (1978) and *Bill and Pete Go Down the Nile* (1987), we learn about Bill, a crocodile, and his sidekick, Pete, who is a talking toothbrush. The two characters meet when Bill is about to go to school for the first time, and is rather embarrassed because he can't spell his full name, William Everett. Pete introduces Bill to the concept of nicknames, and the two have a good time. When they reappear in *Bill and Pete Go Down the Nile*, the two companions visit Egypt, and dePaola introduces his young readers to the culture and habitat of the ancient Egyptians.

Another original work by dePaola is *Bonjour, Mr. Satie* (1991). In this charming tale about a family of cats, the young Rosalie and Conrad listen to the stories told by their uncle, Mr. Satie, who has come to visit. Mr. Satie tells them fascinating tales about his adventures in Paris, France. There, he met all sorts of exciting people, like the artists Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse and the writers Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas.

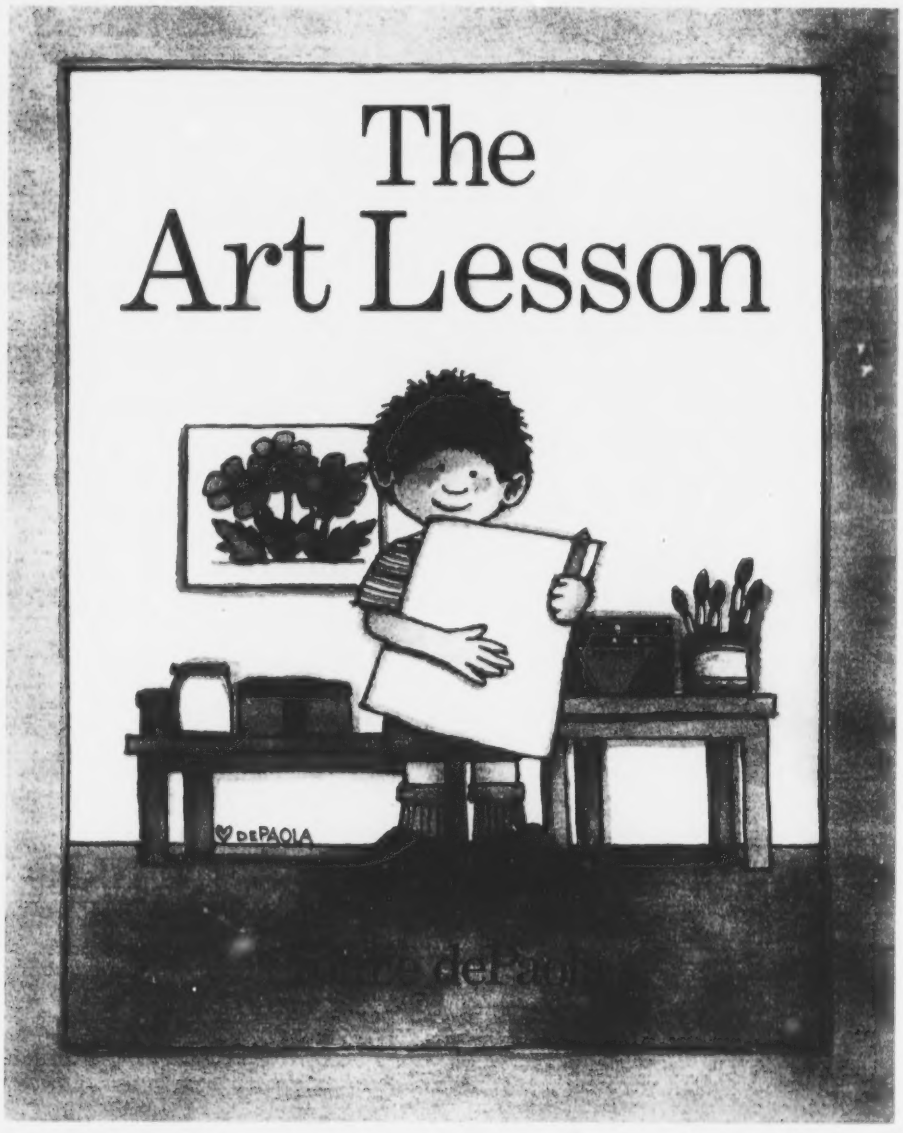
DePaola on His Art

DePaola says that the images that appear frequently in his illustrations—white birds, pink tiled roofs, arches—were evident in his first drawings and paintings. His work is easily recognizable to his many young fans, which delights him. "It thrills and pleases me when teachers, parents, and librarians tell me that young children know when they are looking at one of my books or a piece of my art."

DePaola describes how he goes about preparing to create a new book in the following quote: "Visual research is probably the most important step of all for me. The way I go about it is quite simple. I surround my studio with piles of art books that relate to the relevant period or place. Then comes the fun part. I look and look and look. Sometimes I'll sketch, but mostly I just "observe". . . . When I feel totally saturated with imagery, then, and only then, do I start my art."

DePaola takes his craft very seriously, and he has many interesting things to say about his art work and technique. "My preference is for strong line and design, using the medium and technique appropriate to the piece. I personally use one of several techniques for my work. The first is very straightforward—a dark brown line with the color applied within the line. For this, I use Rotring Artists Colors, which is a liquid transparent acrylic paint. I use it because it is colorfast and permanent and totally intermixable. It reduces with water and is waterproof when dry, so I can build up thin 'skins' of color. *The Art Lesson* was done in this technique. The second technique is more painterly. I use acrylic paints opaquely. I lay down a base color, usually a golden shade. Next, I do a line drawing, again, with a dark brown line. Then, I begin painting, building up layer after layer. *Bonjour, Mr. Satie*, is a good example of this technique."

DePaola continues to travel to schools and speak to students and parents all over the country. He is also a fierce advocate for the importance of the arts to young minds. "Remember that art, music, literature, poetry, painting and sculpture are not luxuries. They're necessary to the soul. We can feed the intellect, but if we don't feed the soul as well—the intellect is going to starve to death."



Current Plans

In 1988, dePaola began his own imprint, or division, within the Putnam Publishing Group, the company that publishes his work. Called "Whitebird" for the white dove that so often appears in his illustrations, the division has produced a number of illustrated folk tales from cultures all over the world. Tales from India, Israel, Switzerland, Native American tribes, and others will be appearing over the next several years. DePaola will write and illustrate some of these books and will serve as art director for others.

With so many projects going on, the indefatigable Tomie dePaola sees no end in sight to his creative endeavors. "I really do care about my young audience, and I am so fortunate to have been able to live my life and my career doing what I want, which is such a wonderful thing: introducing children to literature and to art. I hope that I live a long life because I have so many ideas that I still want to do."

The Achievement of Tomie dePaola

In summing up Tomie dePaola and his achievement, Robert D. Hale said this:

"Of all the zillions of things that could be said about Tomie dePaola, the one that comes most strongly to mind is his exuberance. He is joyful, ebullient. His exhilaration fills all the spaces around him, wrapping everyone present in rare high spirits. The books he creates radiate this quality of good cheer, even when they have serious messages to impart as in *Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs,* in *Now One Foot, Now the Other,* or in *Oliver Buttons Is a Sissy*. . . . Everything Tomie does is done with gusto and zest—which is why his work appeals to all generations. Tomie's softly colorful illustrations invite tots, while at the other end of the cycle adults appreciate his sharing of feelings. The most satisfying response a reader can have is recognition. Recognizing an emotion is part and parcel of dePaola books. There is never a barren page."

"I really do care about my young audience, and I am so fortunate to have been able to live my life and my career doing what I want, which is such a wonderful thing: introducing children to literature and to art. I hope that I live a long life because I have so many ideas that I still want to do."

HOME AND FAMILY

DePaola never married or had children of his own. He lives in a large, old house in New Hampshire, with four dogs. He works in a rebuilt barn that is more than 200 years old. His hobbies include gardening and cooking. His garden contains literally thousands of flowers, and his old house has six ovens.

SELECTED WRITINGS

As Author and Illustrator

The Wonderful Dragon of Timlin, 1966
Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs, 1973
Charlie Needs a Cloak, 1974
Strega Nona: An Old Tale, 1975
The Quicksand Book, 1977
When Everyone Was Fast Asleep, 1976
Bill and Pete, 1978
The Clown of God, 1978
The Knight and the Dragon, 1980
The Night Before Christmas, 1980
The Friendly Beasts, 1981
Now One Foot, Now the Other, 1981
Giorgio's Village, 1982
The Legend of the Bluebonnet, 1983
Marianna Mae and Nursey, 1983
The Story of the Three Wise Kings, 1983
The First Christmas, 1984
Mary Had a Little Lamb, 1984
Tomie dePaola's Mother Goose, 1985
Tomie dePaola's Favorite Nursery Tales, 1986
Bill and Pete Go Down the Nile, 1987
What the Mailman Brought, 1987
Baby's First Christmas, 1988
The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush, 1988
Tomie dePaola's Book of Poems, 1988
The Art Lesson, 1989
Bonjour, Mr. Satie, 1991
Jamie O'Rourke and the Big Potato, 1992
Strega Nona Meets Her Match, 1993
Tom, 1993
Kit and Kat, 1994
Country Angel Christmas, 1995
The Baby Sister, 1996
The Bubble Factory, 1996
Get Dressed, Santa! 1996
Strega Nona: Her Story, 1996
Days of the Blackbird, 1997
Hey Diddle Diddle, 1998

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As Illustrator

Sound, 1963
Can't You Make Them behave, King George? 1977, written by Jean Fritz
SHH! We're Writing the Constitution, 1987, written by Jean Fritz

HONORS AND AWARDS

Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies (National Council of Social Studies): 1973, for *Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs;* 1977, for *Can't You Make Them Behave, King George?* 1981, for *Now One Foot, Now the Other;* 1983, for *The Legend of the Bluebonnet;* 1987, for *Shh! We're Writing the Constitution;* 1988, for *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*
Christopher Award: 1977, for *Can't You Make Them Behave, King George?*
Children's Choices (International Reading Association): 1977, for *Can't You Make Them Behave, King George?* 1978, for *Bill and Pete;* 1985, for *Tomie dePaola's Mother Goose*
School Library Journal Best Books of the Year: 1977, for *Can't You Make Them Behave, King George?*
School Library Journal Best of the Best Books, 1966-1976: 1977, for *Can't You Make Them Behave, King George?*
Best of the 1980s (*Booklist):* for *Tomie dePaola's Mother Goose*
Editor's Choice (*Booklist):* 1980, for *The Knight and the Dragon;* 1983, for *The Legend of the Bluebonnet;* 1985, for *Tome's dePaola's Mother Goose;* 1986, for *Tomie dePaola's Favorite Nursery Tales;* 1988, for *Tomie dePaola's Book of Poems*
Library of Congress Books for Children: 1980, for *The Knight and the Dragon;* 1983, for *The Legend of the Bluebonnet;* 1983, for *The Story of the Three Wise Kings;* 1984, for *The First Christmas;* 1985, for *Tomie dePaola's Mother Goose;* 1986, for *Tomie's dePaola's Favorite Nursery Tales*
Notable Children's Book (American Library Association): 1985, for *Tomie dePaola's Mother Goose;* 1987, for *Shh! We're Writing the Constitution*
Teachers' Choices (International Reading Association): 1988, for *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*

FURTHER READING

Books

Children's Books and Their Creators, 1995
Contemporary Authors New Revision Series, Vol. 37
Fifth Book of Junior Authors & Illustrators, 1983

Something about the Author, Vol. 59
Something about the Author Autobiography Series, Vol. 15
Who's Who in American Art, 1997-98

Periodicals

Booklist, May 1, 1990, p.1705; Oct. 1, 1996, p.338
Horn Book, Nov.-Dec. 1985, p.770; Sep.-Oct. 1993, p.573; Nov. Dec. 1996, p.722; Mar.-Apr. 1997, p.205
Instructor, Mar. 1980, p.32
Language Arts, Mar. 1979, p.296
Publishers Weekly, July 19, 1976, p.66; Feb. 6, 1987, p.16
Reading Teacher, Dec. 1979, p.264
Teaching K-8, Sep. 1993, p.52

Other

"All Things Considered," National Public Radio, Mar. 2, 1998, radio transcript

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New York, NY 10016

WORLD WIDE WEB SITE

http://www.penguinputnam.com/catalog/yreaders/authors/330_biography.html

Lorraine Hansberry 1930-1965

American Playwright
First Black Playwright to Win New York
Drama Critics' Circle Award
Author of *A Raisin in the Sun*

BIRTH

Lorraine Vivian Hansberry was born in Chicago, Illinois, on May 19, 1930. Her father, Carl A. Hansberry, was a wealthy real estate broker who was active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Urban League, and other civil rights organizations. He ran his real

estate company as a family business, hiring relatives who wanted to leave the South or who needed jobs. He even ran (unsuccessfully) for Congress in 1940. Her mother, Nannie Perry Hansberry, had been trained as a teacher, but after her marriage she helped her husband build his successful real estate business. Both parents dedicated their lives to the fight for political and social reforms for the benefit Chicago's African-American community.

Hansberry was descended from slaves on both sides of her family. Her mother was the granddaughter of a slave who, when he was only 12, escaped and moved to New York, where he worked in a theater company. Saving every dollar he earned, he returned to the South and bought his own and his mother's freedom. This heritage of hard work and pride inspired all the family.

Hansberry wrote a letter to the **New York Times** *about the toll it took on her father to fight the racism that pervaded their lives. In it she said: "The cost, in emotional turmoil, time, and money, led to my father's early death as a permanently embittered exile in a foreign country when he saw that after such sacrificial efforts the Negroes of Chicago were as ghetto-locked as ever. . . ."*

Lorraine was the youngest of the four Hansberry children. When she was born, her sister, Mamie, was seven, and her brothers Perry and Carl, Jr. were 10 and 12, respectively. Perhaps because she was so much younger than her siblings, Lorraine grew up as a very independent young girl who was accustomed to spending time alone. She sometimes resented her place in the family. She later wrote: "The last born is an object toy which comes in years when brothers and sisters who are seven, ten, twelve years older are old enough to appreciate it rather than poke out its eyes. They do not mind diapering you the first two years, but by the time you are five you are a pest that has to be attended to in the washroom, taken to the movies and "sat with" at night. You are not a person — you are a nuisance who is not particular fun anymore."

YOUTH

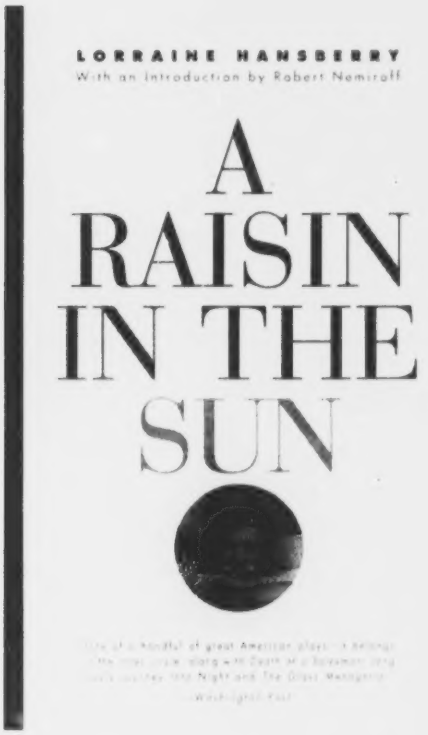
Carl and Nannie Hansberry were very prominent in Chicago's black cultural and political circles. Many well-known blacks visited the Hansberry

home on a regular basis, including poet Langston Hughes, jazz composer and musician Duke Ellington, athlete Jesse Owens, singer-actor Paul Robeson, and the historian and civil rights activist W. E. B. DuBois, who organized the first black protest movement. These influential African-Americans had a significant impact on the young Lorraine. Another frequent visitor was her uncle, William Leo Hansberry, a distinguished scholar of African history at Howard University. He would often bring college students from Ethiopia and other African countries to the United States, thus exposing his nieces and nephews to their African heritage at a time when to be called "black" or "African" was considered an insult by most American "Negroes."

When Lorraine was growing up, Chicago housing was completely segregated, and blacks and whites lived in different areas. So even though the Hansberrys were a comfortable, middle-class family, they lived in the midst of the crowded ghetto known as the "Black Metropolis" on Chicago's South Side. In fact, Carl Hansberry had made most of his money by purchasing large, older houses that had been vacated by the retreating white population and dividing them into small "kitchenette" or studio apartments for black families. One of the reasons for the severe overcrowding in the black ghetto was Chicago's "restrictive covenants," the laws that prevented black people from buying or renting houses or apartments in certain areas of the city.

Carl Hansberry was strongly opposed to segregated housing and decided to test the legality of these laws by purchasing a house in Hyde Park, a neighborhood near the University of Chicago that was restricted to whites. Lorraine and her sister were sitting on the porch of their new home one day when an angry mob gathered on the sidewalk. The two girls went inside, and as they were standing in the living room a brick came crashing through the window with such force that it imbedded itself in the opposite wall, missing eight-year-old Lorraine by inches. This incident was followed by threats to burn or bomb the house if the family didn't move out. Lorraine and her sister spent their nights huddled in an upstairs bedroom while their older brothers stood guard at the windows and their parents patrolled the downstairs. A lawsuit was filed against the family, and they were forced to move out. But Carl Hansberry brought a counter-suit that was fought all the way to the U. S. Supreme Court. In 1940, he and NAACP lawyers won their case against restrictive covenants.

Although he had won the legal battle, Carl Hansberry ended up bitter and disillusioned when the city that had been his home for so many years continued to discriminate against blacks. He decided that the U.S. was



not a good place for a self-respecting black man to raise his family, so he bought a house in a suburb of Mexico City. He moved there in 1946 and was preparing to bring his family down when he died quite suddenly of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 51. Although Lorraine was only 16 at the time, she was well aware of the financial and emotional toll that his years of struggle in the courts had taken on her father. She was convinced that racism had killed him. She wrote a letter to the *New York Times* about the toll it took on him to fight the racism that pervaded their lives. In it she said: "The cost, in emotional turmoil, time, and money, led to my father's early death as a permanently embittered exile in a foreign country when he saw that after such sacrificial efforts the Negroes of Chicago were as ghetto-locked as ever. . . ."

Lorraine never forgot the incident that dominated her childhood, and she used it later as the basis for a scene in her first play. But even more importantly, her father's willingness to fight for his family's rights gave her a strong sense of pride in her African-American heritage and a desire for freedom and justice.

EARLY MEMORIES

Because her family was relatively wealthy compared to other black families living in the Chicago ghetto, Lorraine often felt alienated from her classmates. She remembered receiving a white fur coat from her parents as a Christmas gift when she was five. This was during the Depression of the 1930s, when most black families were struggling to put food on the table, and she was very embarrassed about wearing it to school. "My mother sent me to kindergarten in white fur in the middle of the Depression," she recalled. "The kids beat me up; and I think it was from that moment I became a rebel."

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EDUCATION

Although her family could well have afforded to send Lorraine to private schools, they chose to send her to public schools on Chicago's South Side. Her first elementary school was Betsy Ross Elementary, a segregated, all-black school. She called it a "ghetto school, a school for black children and, therefore, one in which as many things as possible might be safely thought of as 'expendable.' That, after all, was why it existed: not to give education, but to withhold as much as possible just as the ghetto itself exists not to give people homes, but to cheat them out of as much decent housing as possible." Although she could read at the university level by the seventh grade, Lorraine never learned basic arithmetic. Even as an adult, she looked back on the inferior education she had received as a child as a "scar" that she'd carried with her from the ghetto.

Hansberry called her elementary school a "ghetto school, a school for black children and, therefore, one in which as many things as possible might be safely thought of as 'expendable.' That, after all, was why it existed: not to give education, but to withhold as much as possible just as the ghetto itself exists not to give people homes, but to cheat them out of as much decent housing as possible."

Hansberry attended predominantly white Englewood High School. She was the president of the debating society and excelled in art, history, and English. She was also drawn to the theater, especially after attending performances of *Othello* and *The Tempest* starring black actor Paul Robeson. And she had one especially inspiring English teacher, whom the students called "Pale Hecate," after a Greek goddess. Pale Hecate gave Hansberry a "C" on a paper—for "cheating" herself. She told Hansberry: "For them that would do half when all is called for; for them that will slip and slide through life at the edge of their minds, never once pushing into the interior to see what wonders are hiding there—content to drift along on whatever gets them by, cheating themselves, cheating the world, cheating Nature! That is what the 'C" means, my dear child." This teacher taught Hansberry an important lesson in challenging herself, and Hansberry later credited her with instilling in her both a love of drama and the pursuit of excellence.

During her high school years, Hansberry also developed a love of Africa. At this time, the African continent was in the throes of decolonization. The European powers that had exploited the nations of Africa for hundreds of years were fighting wars of independence with their former colonists. She was now drawn to the work of her uncle, Leo Hansberry, a prominent scholar in the field of what the indigenous African peoples had given to Western culture. Leo Hansberry taught that "It was [Africans] it appears, who first learned and then taught the rest of mankind how to make and use tools, to develop a religion, to practice art, to domesticate animals, to smelt metals—particularly iron, and to create and maintain a deliberately constructed and tradition-bound state." These ideas deeply influenced Hansberry's growing awareness of her African heritage and culture, and a growing militancy.

Hansberry graduated from Englewood High in January 1948. Although most of her family had gone to black colleges in the south, that did not appeal to Hansberry. That January, she enrolled at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, a predominantly white university where she was the first black student to live in her residence. According to Patricia and Frederick McKissack, in their biography of Hansberry, she enjoyed her early college experience. "She made friends quickly and spent hours talking about boys, sex, politics, God, books, music, and art, but she found the traditional course offerings uninspired and boring."

Despite the mediocrity of her classes, Hansberry's imagination was fired by her first exposure to the work of Irish playwright Sean O'Casey. After attending a university production of his play *Juno and the Paycock,* she felt she knew that she would make the theater her life. She loved the way he told the truth about his people through his art. "I love Sean O'Casey," she wrote. "O'Casey never fools you about the Irish; you see . . . the Irish drunkard, the Irish braggart, the Irish liar . . . and the genuine heroes, which must naturally emerge when you tell the truth about people. This, to me, is the height of artistic perception and is the most rewarding kind of thing that can happen in drama."

Still, racism clouded her college experience of drama. Although her work was above average, the professor in her class on set design gave her a D because he didn't want to encourage a young black woman to enter a white-dominated field. But it wasn't enough to deter Hansberry.

During her second year of college, Hansberry began a draft of a play, never published or produced, that expressed her love of the movement to decolonize Africa. It focused on a college student named Candace, who becomes involved with a young African. In 1950, she experienced an artis-

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tic awakening of another kind. She attended a lecture by the famous American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. She wrote about the experience later, in the third person, describing herself as "Lorraine." "Wright attacked almost everything—and foremost among them, the building he was standing in for its violation of the organic principles of architecture; he attacked babbitry and the nature of education. Lorraine agreed with Wright's assertion that 'we put in so many fine plums and get out so many fine prunes.' Everyone laughed—the faculty nervously I guess; but the students cheered. Lorraine left the university in February 1950 to pursue, as she described it, 'an education of another kind'."

In a letter to her mother before the Broadway opening of **Raisin in the Sun,** *Hansberry outlined her purpose: "Mama, it is a play that tells the truth about people—Negroes and life and I think it will help a lot of people understand how we are just as complicated as they are—and just as mixed up—but above all, that we have among our miserable and downtrodden ranks—people who are the very essence of human dignity."*

FIRST JOBS

Hansberry left college and home in 1950 and moved to New York. She landed a job as a typist and lived in an apartment with four roommates. She loved New York, and she immersed herself in the world of Harlem, the center of African-American life in the city. She also became involved in politics and in the continuing struggle for civil rights for blacks.

Within a short time, Hansberry got a job with Paul Robeson's radical black monthly publication, *Freedom*. No longer primarily an actor and a singer, Robeson had become a full-time political activist for labor and civil rights causes. Hansberry worked at *Freedom* for two years, eventually becoming associate editor in 1952. She reviewed books by black authors and wrote articles on child labor, the roles played by blacks on television, and the African liberation movement, expanding her knowledge of domestic and world problems.

When the U. S. State Department denied Robeson a passport to travel to Uruguay for the Intercontinental Peace Congress in 1952, Hansberry went in his place, delivering an impressive speech to the Congress at the age of only 22.

Lorraine Hansberry receives the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for best drama in 1959 for A Raisin in the Sun

In 1953, Hansberry married Robert Nemiroff, a white student at New York University. After her marriage, she continued to write for *Freedom* on a part-time basis, and also took a course in African history from the famous African-American civil rights figure W.E.B DuBois. She wanted to find more time to write, so she also took several other part-time jobs, one with a furrier and one with a music production company, allowing herself more time to devote to her craft.

BECOMING A WRITER

In 1956, Hansberry's husband had a windfall: he earned $100,000 for writing the hit song "Cindy, Oh Cindy" with his friend Burt D'Lugoff. After that, Hansberry was able to stop working at other jobs and become

a full-time writer. She began work on several different projects, including plays, a novel, and an opera. One night, she and her husband attended a play whose treatment of blacks disgusted her. The characters were stereotyped, as was the black dialect in which they spoke. She came home determined to write "a play about Negroes that will be good art." Eight months later, she had completed the first draft of *A Raisin in the Sun.*

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

A Raisin in The Sun

Hansberry took the title for her play from a poem called "Harlem" by African-American poet Langston Hughes. The poem asks, "What happens to a dream deferred: Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?" The play takes place in 1957, on the south side of Chicago. It focuses on the Youngers, an African-American family who live in a run-down, cramped apartment not unlike the "kitchenettes" that Hansberry's father used to rent to the city's poor black families. Mr. Younger has just died, and his family has collected $10,000 in insurance money. But each family member has a different idea about how to use the money. Lena, the mother, wants to use the money to buy the family a nicer house in a white neighborhood. Her son Walter, who works as a chauffeur for a white man, wants to purchase a liquor store and run his own business. The daughter, Beneatha, wants the money for medical school. Lena finally compromises by using $3500 as a down-payment on a house and giving the rest to Walter and Beneatha. When Walter loses his and Beneatha's share of the money to a con artist, the family's dreams are shattered. Although Walter toys with the idea of getting the money back by selling the family's new house to a white man who is willing to buy it at a profit just to keep them out of the neighborhood, in the end he asserts his pride by refusing the white man's offer.

Beneatha, the daughter, symbolizes her family's passage from the lower to the middle class. A university student who wants to become a doctor, she has two boyfriends: one is the son of a successful black businessman, and the other is a student from Nigeria. The rich man's son offers her a life of ease and material comforts, while the Nigerian offers her a life dedicated to self-realization in an emerging African country. The conflict among these three young people is another of the play's central themes, reflecting Hansberry's interest in black Americans' African heritage and her early exposure to the African students her Uncle Leo brought to the Hansberry home.

Broadway Debut

While working on the play, Hansberry read a draft to her husband and his former employer, a music publisher named Philip Rose. Rose was so impressed that he said he wanted to produce it on Broadway. He was unable to persuade any well-known New York producers to take a chance on the young playwright's first finished work because it was about a black family, and no one thought that audiences would take it seriously. But Rose got in touch with his friend Sidney Poitier, a popular New York actor, who loved the work and wanted to play the part of Walter. Through Poitier, Rose contracted with Lloyd Richards, a prominent black director. Eventually, with the help of the popular African-American actor Harry Bellafonte, Rose found more than 150 small investors who put up the money so that the play could have "trial runs" in New Haven, Philadelphia, and Chicago. The play was a great success in these cities, and it premiered on Broadway at the Ethel Barrymore Theater on March 11, 1959.

In a letter to her mother before the Broadway opening, Hansberry outlined her purpose: "Mama, it is a play that tells the truth about people—Negroes and life and I think it will help a lot of people understand how we are just as complicated as they are—and just as mixed up—but above all, that we have among our miserable and downtrodden ranks—people who are the very essence of human dignity." This message came across, with tremendous success.

A Raisin in the Sun was the first drama on Broadway to focus on the black experience with an all-black cast and a black director. To the surprise of many, it was both a critical success and a box office hit, providing audiences with a greater understanding of the African-American's search for identity, both within the family and within a racially prejudiced society. Most of the actors in the original cast—which included Sidney Poitier, Claudia McNeil, Louis Gossett, Jr., and Ruby Dee—went on to become stars, and the play's director, Lloyd Richards, later became director of the Yale Repertory Theater.

A Raisin in the Sun ran for 538 performances on Broadway and won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for the best play of the 1958-59 season when its author was only 28 years old. She was the youngest person, the first African American, and only the fifth woman to be so honored. For many of those first viewers, the struggles of the Younger family reflected the social and political struggles that blacks in America were going through at the time. The Supreme Court had ordered the desegregation of America's schools only five years earlier, and blacks were just beginning to experience a new militancy and pride in their African ances-

Sidney Poitier and Claudia McNeil in the 1961 film, A Raisin in the Sun

tors. As prominent African-American author James Baldwin said, "Never before in the entire history of the American theater had so much of the truth of black people's lives been seen on the stage."

Yet the response to the play by whites and blacks was different from what Hansberry had expected. Some white critics saw the play solely in terms of what it had to say about humanity as a whole. Hansberry responded, "I don't think there is anything more universal in the world than man's op-

pression to man." But, she said, "one of the most sound ideas in dramatic writing is that, in order to create the universal, you must pay very great attention to the specific." Hers was a play about "the many gradations even in one Negro family, the clash of the old and new, but most of all the unbelievable courage of the Negro people." Still, whites saw the play without really understanding it, in Hansberry's mind, and some blacks thought whites liked it because it showed how much they were alike, not what made them different.

"I come from an extremely comfortable background, materially speaking. And yet, we live in a ghetto . . . which automatically means intimacy with all classes and all kinds of experiences. It's not any more difficult for me to know the people I wrote about than it is for me to know member of my family. This is one of the things that the American experience has meant to Negroes. We are one people."

Hansberry also had to deal with charges of elitism. Some black critics thought that since she came from a comfortable, middle-class black family, she didn't have the background to write a convincing play about the plight of a poor black family. Of that, Hansberry said, "I come from an extremely comfortable background, materially speaking. And yet, we live in a ghetto . . . which automatically means intimacy with all classes and all kinds of experiences. It's not any more difficult for me to know the people I wrote about than it is for me to know member of my family. This is one of the things that the American experience has meant to Negroes. We are *one* people."

Hansberry's next project was to write a film version of her play. Produced in 1961, the movie feature many of the original Broadway actors in a reprise of their stage roles. The film was a success, although some critics thought that the impact of the piece had been lost when it moved from the stage to the screen. Hansberry received a nomination for best screenplay of the year by the Screen Actor's Guild. The movie version also won the 1961 Gary Cooper Award for Outstanding Human Values at the Cannes Film Festival.

In 1961, Hansberry wrote *The Drinking Gourd* for an NBC television series commemorating the centennial of the Civil War, but it was never produced. The play takes its title from the famous spiritual of the same name.

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It speaks of following the constellation, the Big Dipper, or the Drinking Gourd, that points toward the North Star, which was used by escaping slaves in the 19th century to find their way to freedom. Hansberry researched the subject of slavery thoroughly, focusing her work on the slave system's devastating impact. In the end, NBC executives decided it was too controversial for television and canceled the entire series. It has never been produced.

The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window

Hansberry's second play was much anticipated. But *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* was quite different from its predecessor. It was about a Greenwich Village Jewish intellectual who owns a small, alternative newspaper and gets involved in local politics, only to discover that the candidate he supports is involved with criminals who are exploiting the community. The play presents an ongoing argument over the significance of political activity and was designed to jolt audiences out of their passive, uninvolved state.

Perhaps because it was so different from *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* failed to achieve the commercial success enjoyed by its predecessor. It was primarily a play about ideas, and both critics and audiences found it complicated and confusing. They had expected Hansberry to produce another warm, emotionally wrenching drama about blacks like *A Raisin in the Sun*, and they were disappointed when she created a play with a primarily white cast of characters that called for intellectuals to get involved in social problems and world issues.

It was during the writing of *Sidney Brustein's Window* that Lorraine Hansberry started losing weight and experiencing fainting spells and attacks of nausea. She was hospitalized for tests in the spring of 1963 and operated on twice (unsuccessfully) that summer. The diagnosis was cancer of the duodenum (the first portion of the small intestine). She was treated with heavy doses of radiation and chemotherapy and managed to recover enough strength to attend rehearsals for *Sidney Brustein's Window*.

In the middle of the rehearsal schedule, Hansberry took time to accompany a group of prominent African-Americans who met with Attorney General Robert Kennedy. She attended the meeting with James Baldwin, actors Harry Bellafonte, Lena Horne, and Rip Torn, and civil rights leaders Ed Berry and Jerome Smith. The meeting had been arranged to discuss the increasingly violent racial crisis going on in the American South. The proceedings went badly. Hansberry left in disgust, convinced that Kennedy

was not listening to her and the others. She returned to the rehearsals for her new play, But by the time *Sidney Brustein's Window* opened on Broadway on October 15, 1964, Lorraine Hansberry knew she was dying.

Far from being the success that *Raisin* was, *Sidney Brustein's Window* failed to bring in an audience. Most Broadway plays that receive such mixed reviews usually close within a few days. But that wasn't true with *Sidney Brustein's Window*, because the people involved in the play believed in it and tried everything they could to keep it going. One woman gave her entire life savings so that the play could run for a second week. Others who contributed to its survival became well-known actors and writers—including Alan Alda, Shelley Winters, Viveca Lindfors, Anne Bancroft, Marlon Brando, Lillian Hellman, Mel Brooks, and James Baldwin. Even the audience took up a collection to extend the play's run. It ended up lasting for 101 performances, closing on January 12, 1965, the night that Lorraine Hansberry died at the age of 34.

Les Blancs and Other Works

At the time of her death, Hansberry was working on a number of different things. One was a third play called *Les Blancs* (The Whites), set in Africa at the time of an impending revolution. The main character, a black intellectual named Tshembe Matoshe, must choose between two conflicting alternatives: his comfortable life in England with his wife, who is white, and the opportunity to lead his people in their fight against colonial oppression. The play was completed by Hansberry's husband, Robert Nemiroff, who was guided by the notes and instructions she'd left behind. It was produced in 1970 with James Earl Jones in the starring role, but it received mixed reviews and ran for only 47 performances.

During her final illness, Hansberry wrote prolifically. She worked on *What Use Are the Flowers?*, a play about a nuclear holocaust. She began a novel, *All the Dark and Beautiful Warriors;* a musical adaptation of *Laughing Boy,* Oliver LaFarge's novel about the Navajo Indians; and an opera about Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Haitian revolutionary.

To Be Young, Gifted and Black

During her treatment for cancer, Hansberry was allowed to leave the hospital for one day so she could address the winners of the United Negro College Fund's writing contest. In this speech, she used a phrase that has now become famous, telling her young listeners that "to be young, gifted and black" was a blessing they should not waste.

Ruby Dee and Claudia McNeil in a scene from the 1961 film,
A Raisin in the Sun

Hansberry's husband took this phrase as the title for an informal autobiography he assembled from Hansberry's plays, speeches, letters, and diaries a few years after her death. It was originally conceived as a play, but he couldn't find anyone to produce it. So he revised the collection of materials into a book in 1969 that was later adapted for the stage and television. Lorraine's friend Nina Simone wrote a song with the same title, which became very popular.

HANSBERRY'S LEGACY

Lorraine Hansberry made a significant contribution to the American theater, even though only two of her plays were produced during her lifetime. *A Raisin in the Sun* marked a turning point for black playwrights, black actors, and black directors, many of whom were inspired or helped by her success. It brought black audiences into the theater in huge numbers for the first time and proved that a serious play by and about blacks could attract white audiences as well.

A Raisin in the Sun has become a permanent fixture in the American theater. Since its first performance, the play has been translated into more than 30 languages and has been staged all over the world. It has been

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produced by thousands of amateur and college theatrical groups and, in 1973, was turned into an award-winning musical, *Raisin*. In 1989 a made-for-television version starring Danny Glover and Esther Rolles brought the work to a new generation.

Hansberry's success as a playwright gave her a platform from which to address the public about civil rights and world peace. Although her main commitment was to the liberation of her fellow African-Americans, Lorraine Hansberry also spoke out publicly on behalf of all people of African descent. Her profound respect for her own racial heritage and for African culture anticipated the black nationalist movement of the 1960s, while her outspoken support of women's rights came long before the rise of the feminist movement in the 1970s. She even criticized President John F. Kennedy's handling of the Cuban missile crisis at a time when most Americans supported his actions, claiming that he had endangered the cause of world peace. Although her life was cut short by illness, Lorraine Hansberry was awarded the kind of respect that is usually reserved for artists who have spent decades producing a body of work.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Hansberry met Robert Nemiroff, an aspiring white writer and graduate student in English and history at New York University, in a picket line protesting discrimination in sports at the university. After dating for several months and participating in political and cultural activities together, they were married on June 20, 1953, and settled in a Greenwich Village apartment above a laundry. Although there had never been an interracial marriage in the Hansberry family, Lorraine's parents accepted her choice because he came from a cultured, educated family like her own, and because his Russian Jewish heritage made him as much of an "outsider" as she was.

Hansberry's celebrity after *A Raisin in the Sun*, combined with her political activities and public appearances, eventually took their toll on her marriage. Having separated quietly several years earlier, she and Nemiroff ended up getting a divorce in March 1964, but they kept it a secret from all but their closest friends because of Hansberry's illness. Hansberry and Nemiroff remained close and continued to collaborate on artistic projects until her death in January 1965. Most people didn't know about her divorce until her will was read.

Hansberry chose Nemiroff as her literary executor, and she entrusted him with completing her last play, *Les Blancs*. Nemiroff also edited a volume of her collected plays, put together the stage and book versions of *To Be*

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Young, Gifted and Black and spent many years promoting and publishing her work following her death. He died in 1991.

FAVORITE BOOKS

Hansberry's favorite book was *The Second Sex,* by the French feminist author Simone de Beauvoir, which she claimed "changed my life." She agreed with de Beauvoir that marriage was a trap that women were often forced into because of the limitations that society placed on their lives. Despite the fact that she was married to Robert Nemiroff in her early 20s, Hansberry was never convinced that marriage was right for her, and she had no intentions of being a housewife.

Hansberry was also a fan of Pearl S. Buck, the first American woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. She admired the heroism and strength of Buck's women and people of color, who provided her with a model for the black characters in her own plays.,

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Before she became ill, Hansberry enjoyed ping-pong, skiing, walking in the woods, and reading biographies.

WRITINGS

Plays

A Raisin in the Sun, 1959
The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window, 1964
To Be Young, Gifted and Black: Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words, adapted by Robert Nemiroff, 1969
Lorraine Hansberry: The Collected Last Plays (Les Blancs, The Drinking Gourd, What Use Are Flowers?), edited by Robert Nemiroff, 1972

Books

The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality, 1964 (later retitled and published in England as, *A Matter of Colour: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality in the USA,* 1965)

Screenplays

A Raisin in the Sun, 1960

HONORS AND AWARDS

New York Drama Critics' Circle Award: 1959, for *A Raisin in the Sun*
Cannes Film Festival Special Award: 1961, for the screenplay for *A Raisin in the Sun*

FURTHER READING

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Cheney, Anne. *Lorraine Hansberry*, 1984.
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McKissack, Patricia C. and Frederick L. McKissack. *Young, Black, and Determined: A Biography of Lorraine Hansberry*, 1998
Tripp, Janet. *The Importance of Lorraine Hansbery*, 1998

Periodicals

American Theatre, Nov. 1984, p.5
Chicago Tribune, Sep. 8, 1988, p.E11
Current Biography 1959
Ebony, Apr. 1959, p.95; Mar. 1984, p.57
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Karen Hesse 1952-

American Author of Books for Children and Young Adults
Winner of the 1998 Newbery Medal for
Out of the Dust

BIRTH

Karen Hesse was born Karen Sue Levin in Baltimore, Maryland, on August 29, 1952. Her father, Alvin Donald Levin, was a "collection man." His job was to drive around the city and collect small payments from poor families who had purchased appliances or furniture from the store where he worked. Sometimes, he would let young Karen ride along. Her mother,

Frances Broth Levin, worked as a substitute kindergarten teacher and as a receptionist in a beauty salon. Karen had an older brother, Mark. Her parents were divorced during her teen years, and after her mother remarried in 1971, Karen also gained a stepsister, Randy.

YOUTH

Hesse grew up as part of a working-class Jewish family in a small rowhouse in Baltimore. She was rather sickly as a child, and she did not hesitate to complain about her various problems. "I spent my entire childhood bouncing from one illness to another. That my mother, or the rest of my family, feels any affection toward me at all is a testament to the tenacity of love," she noted. "My whining knew no end, so my mother hung a calendar on my closet door and gave me a gold star for every day I went without crying. I just loved those gold stars. Unfortunately, I never earned many."

"As a child, I usually faded into the background. I liked being unnoticed. It enabled me to observe and eavesdrop on conversations I would not ordinarily have been privy to. With the exception of a few teachers and family members, most people never really noticed me."

Although Hesse played with a number of children in her neighborhood, she never really felt as if she belonged. "Long skinny legs, buckteeth, tons of freckles, enormous green eyes, and a mop of brown curls. I seemed to be all angles and bones through elementary school," she recalled. "As a child, I usually faded into the background. I liked being unnoticed. It enabled me to observe and eavesdrop on conversations I would not ordinarily have been privy to. With the exception of a few teachers and family members, most people never really noticed me."

Hesse discovered two escapes during her childhood that she would enjoy for the rest of her life: going to the movies and reading. On the weekends, her brother often walked with her to the local theater to attend matinees. "Movies provided me with the opportunity to slip out of my cranky little body for a couple of hours," she related. She also loved to read and spent much of her free time at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore. "Beginning with Dr. Seuss, I read my way through the picture books, the shorter chapter books, and finally the novels. The librarian fed me literature. I ate it as gluttonously as chocolate pudding," she stated.

Hesse spent a great deal of her time at home reading, as well. Her favorite spot was in the branches of a tree in her backyard. "Such a small house as my childhood home provided few places for private retreat. Instead, I found myself racing out the back door, along the fence laced with honeysuckle, and climbing into the first notch of the apple tree. There, cradled in the boughs of the tree, I spent hours reading. Often my bony bottom would go numb, but I loved it up there so much, I ignored the discomfort."

Hesse always loved animals and adopted several stray cats and dogs as a girl. Her childhood pets included an orange cat named Kitty-Tiger and a beagle named Snooper. Some of these early pets later became the models for animals in her books.

EDUCATION

During the years that her family lived in the city, Hesse attended Baltimore public schools. At Pimlico Elementary School, her fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Datnoff, encouraged her to write. "From the time I was ten I thought of myself as 'good with words,' thanks to a perceptive and supportive fifth grade teacher. Mrs. Datnoff believed I could be a professional writer some day and because she believed, I believed."

Hesse spent much of her free time at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore. "Beginning with Dr. Seuss, I read my way through the picture books, the shorter chapter books, and finally the novels. The librarian fed me literature. I ate it as gluttonously as chocolate pudding."

In 1966, when Hesse was 14 years old, her family moved to an apartment in nearby Pikesville, where she became a student at Pikesville Senior High School. It was during high school that Hesse discovered she enjoyed acting, and she starred in several school plays. "I loved being on stage, being someone else," she recalled. "Even in 'improvs' during drama class, I lost myself in my character to the point that I'd forget I was on stage. Suddenly I sort of 'woke up' and noticed people were crying. I had no idea really what I'd said or done, but whatever it was seemed to have an extraordinary effect on people."

Although Hesse was usually a good student, she ended up failing math and French in tenth grade because she was distracted by problems at home. Her parents' marriage was disintegrating, which was very hard on Karen. Her grades improved once she was able to concentrate on her

schoolwork again, but this poor semester lowered her grade point average. She had problems getting accepted into a good college when she graduated from Pikesville Senior High School in about 1970. But with the help of her drama teacher, she was admitted into Towson State College (now Towson University) in Towson, Maryland.

College Years

At Towson State College, Hesse immediately joined the school drama group. During her freshman year, she was working on the lighting for a student production when she was introduced to a fellow student named Randy Hesse. "It was love at first sight. For both of us," she remembered. Although they came from different backgrounds, they decided to marry. Their families didn't support their plans, so they eloped on Thanksgiving of 1971. "We probably wouldn't have rushed into marriage without trying harder for our parents' approval, but the Vietnam War raged and Randy had received orders to go overseas with the navy," Hesse noted. Her new husband's military service lasted for two years.

"From the time I was ten I thought of myself as 'good with words,' thanks to a perceptive and supportive fifth grade teacher. Mrs. Datnoff believed I could be a professional writer some day and because she believed, I believed."

In the meantime, Hesse transferred to the University of Maryland, where she changed her major from drama to writing. "I couldn't be in love and in the theater at the same time. Both commitments required 100 percent of my heart and soul," she explained. "I gave up theater. I've never regretted that decision." Instead, she concentrated on writing poetry and became quite successful at it. She was even asked to give public readings of her poetry at the university.

Hesse also took a job in the university library system to help pay her way through school. "I shelved, checked out, and checked in books. I also worked in the general reference department, in the reserves department, in periodicals, and in cataloguing," she noted. "I met some of my dearest friends working in the university libraries. Working in a library—well, I loved that the way I love chocolate pudding. It was truly that good." Hesse earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland in 1975.

BECOMING A WRITER

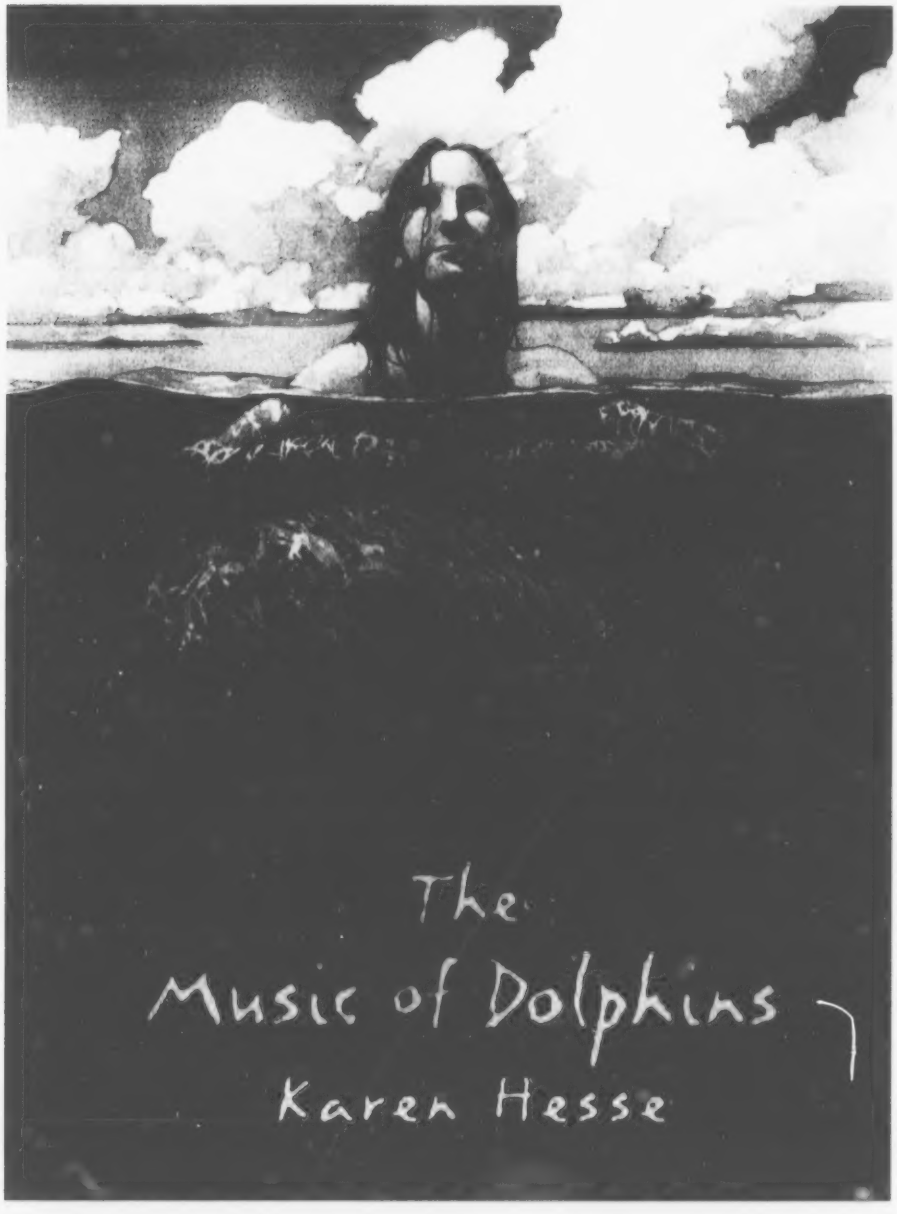
In 1976, shortly after graduating from college, Hesse and her husband took a six-month-long trip across the United States. When they arrived in the quaint New England village of Brattleboro, Vermont, they decided that it felt like home and stayed. For the first few years, they rented a charming old carriage house that they became convinced was occupied by a friendly ghost. When they were expecting their first child, they decided that the house was too small for a family and began looking for a home to buy. "We looked at houses, put down deposits, applied for loans, but every time our loan request would be rejected," Hesse recalled. "Finally I sat down on the bench beside the fireplace and explained to the ghost that we needed to leave. The next loan application went through with no problem, and we moved into the house we occupy to this day."

Hesse continued writing in her spare time. At first she wrote mostly poetry, but she switched to prose when her daughter was born in 1979. As she explains here, she felt that poetry demanded too much of her attention. "I began my literary life as a poet. When I was expecting my first child, my ability to focus on the creation of poetry diminished as my need to focus on the creation of human life increased. For 17 years my brain continued to place the nurturing of my daughters above all other creative endeavors and I forsook poetry. Not that prose is easy to write. But for me, at least, it required a different commitment of brain cells, a different commitment of energy and emotion. Part of my mind was always listening for my children during those years. And that listening rendered me incapable of writing poetry."

Hesse sent many of her manuscripts out to publishers over the next ten years, but they were all rejected. She held a number of different jobs during this time, working as a teacher, librarian, advertising secretary, benefits coordinator, typesetter, proofreader, and book reviewer. "It was typesetting that led me to believe I could succeed as a children's book writer," she noted. "Some of the work I set struck me as very unsatisfying. I thought I could write at least as well if not better. From the time that thought occurred to me, in 1980, until the time I published my first book in 1991, I had a lot to learn. It's one thing to think you can write a good book, it's another thing all together to actually do it."

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

It took years of effort before Hesse's first book was published in 1991. But since that time, she has published books for children of different ages, from picture books for the kindergarten set, to beginning chapter books for those just starting to read, to complex novels for older readers.



Realistic in tone, these works feature children and young adults facing and overcoming the trials and turmoil of everyday life. Some of these works are set in the present, while other are set in the past. Hesse has often based her characters on real people and events drawn from memories from her childhood, but she also conducts research into other periods and places and incorporates that information into her books.

Early Writings

In her first book, *Wish on a Unicorn* (1991), Hesse told the story of Margaret, called Mags, a sixth grader in a poverty-stricken family who must care for her younger siblings while her mother is at work. The dignity that Mags brings to her situation, Hesse has said, was based on her memories of the poor people that she met as a young girl, when she would accompany her father on his collection route. While the plot and narration sometimes seemed contrived in this debut novel, the story was praised for its colorful language and idiom, sensitive and compassionate depictions of poverty, and psychological insight.

In her next novel, *Letters from Rifka* (1992), Hesse patterned the story on the early experiences of her great-aunt. It's 1919, and 12-year-old Rifka and her family are escaping from Russia to the United States. But on the way through Poland, they almost die from typhus. They recover, and they are about to board the ship to come to America when they learn that Rifka has contracted ringworm. They learn that the U.S. immigration authorities probably wouldn't admit her to the country would send her back to Europe instead. So Rifka stays in Belgium to recover, while the rest of her family is forced to go on without her. The novel is told in the form of letters that Rifka writes to her cousin inside a favorite book of poetry. It recounts her experiences while recovering in Belgium, on the lonely boat ride to America, during her detention on Ellis Island while she is waiting to see if the authorities will let her into the country, and, finally, when she meets up with her family. It's a heartwarming tale about immigrants' strength and courage despite the horrors they faced in coming to this country.

Hesse's next few books were written for younger children. She started out with a couple of picture books. *Lester's Dog* (1993) tells the story of a young boy who, with the help of his hearing-impaired friend, develops the courage to face up to a mean and scary dog and rescue a tiny kitten, while *Poppy's Chair* (1993), which was inspired by Hesse's close relationship with her own grandparents, tells the story of a young girl coming to grips with the death of her grandfather. Hesse then went on to write chapter books for beginning readers: *Lavender* (1993), which relates the worries a young girl feels as she awaits the birth of a new baby, her first cousin, and *Sable* (1994), a sweet story about a young girl and the stray dog that she would like to keep, if only she could convince her parents.

After that, Hesse returned to writing books for older readers. Her book *Phoenix Rising* (1994), about the aftermath of an accident at a nuclear power plant in New England, tells the story of 13-year-old Nyle and her grandmother, who are sheep farmers in Vermont. Nyle is still recovering

from the deaths of her mother and grandfather, as well as abandonment by her father. So it's hard for her to get involved when two evacuees from Boston come to stay with them, a boy and his mother who were seriously poisoned by radiation from the nuclear accident. *Phoenix Rising* was based on research, but it was also inspired by a book Hesse read when she was young: John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, about the atom bomb dropped during World War II on the city of Hiroshima, Japan. "*Hiroshima* changed my life. The courage, the profound compassion, dignity, and humanity of the Japanese people in the face of such unfathomable destruction helped me see the world in a way I never had before." This memorable early reading experience, Hesse has said, was part of the reason she decided to write realistic books for young people.

Hesse's book A Time of Angels *was based on a childhood experience. "I saw the sky open late one night when I was no older than 10 or 12. As I watched, angels descended earthward, much as I described in* A Time of Angels. *I have not seen angels like that since then, but seeing them once has made me a believer."*

Hesse's next book, *A Time of Angels* (1995), was based on another childhood experience. "I saw the sky open late one night when I was no older than 10 or 12," she explained. "As I watched, angels descended earthward, much as I described in *A Time of Angels*. I have not seen angels like that since then, but seeing them once has made me a believer." This historical novel, which is set in the eastern United States during World War I, features the experiences of a young girl, Hannah, during the terrible influenza epidemic of 1918. The authenticity of the work derived from its richly drawn characters and meticulous recreation of the historical period.

Hesse has said that her next book, *The Music of Dolphins* (1996), was inspired by a radio interview she heard about a child who was found living alone in the wild. This compelling novel is about Mila, a young girl who was stranded alone at the age of four on an island off the coast of Florida following a plane crash. Raised by dolphins, her language and thinking skills are completely different from humans. After Mila has lived with the dolphins for about ten years, she is found and "rescued" by the Coast Guard. They take her to a facility where she is studied by doctors, who train her to think and talk like a human. The story is told by Mila herself,

and the way in which the story is presented reflects her internal life. At first, she speaks in small words, with simple ideas, and large type. Gradually, as she works with her human helpers, the words become more sophisticated, the ideas more complex, and the type smaller. It's an engrossing and compelling novel that draws the reader into Mila's world, making her longing for her life with the dolphins achingly believable.

Out of the Dust

Hesse's next work, the realistic historical novel *Out of the Dust* (1997), is her most acclaimed work to date. The story evolved in a rather interesting way. Originally, Hesse was working on a picture book about a little girl who wanted it to rain. But friends who read her early version asked why the girl wanted it to rain so much. Hesse started thinking about the Dust Bowl, a time 65 years ago when a severe drought devastated the plains regions of the Midwestern United States. The fertile top soil dried up and blew away in the wind, creating widespread dust storms. Crops and cattle were lost due to the lack of water. At the same time, an economic crisis known as the Great Depression hit the country, and the resulting hardships forced many families to leave their farms. It was a time of desperate poverty for many Americans. From all of this, Hesse was inspired to set her story during the Dust Bowl.

To make sure that she presented this difficult time as realistically as possible, Hesse ordered issues of a 1934 newspaper from Boise City, Oklahoma. When the newspaper arrived on microfilm, she sat and studied it for weeks at her local library. "I dug in and lived through day after day, month after month, year after year of life in the heart of the Depression, in the heart of the dust bowl. I saturated myself with those dusty, dirty, desperate times, and what I discovered thrilled me," she noted. "The newspaper gave me a human perspective—the local talent shows, the moonshine stills, details about how people lived through the time. Old newspapers give a sense of time, of place, the voice of the people."

Hesse effectively evoked that sense of time and place and people in her novel. *Out of the Dust* tells the story of 14-year-old Billie Jo Kelby, who is growing up in a poor farm family in Oklahoma during the 1930s. Billie Jo struggles to cope with a lot of adversity: the death of her mother in a kitchen fire, her own injuries from the same accident, as well as the severe drought that threatens her family's farm. Billie Jo's hands were severely burned in the fire, leaving her unable to play the piano. That takes away her only solace and escape, as well as her only hope for the future: she had planned on a music career to take her away from the farm. Billie Jo is a vibrant character filled with great strength and courage, and the novel

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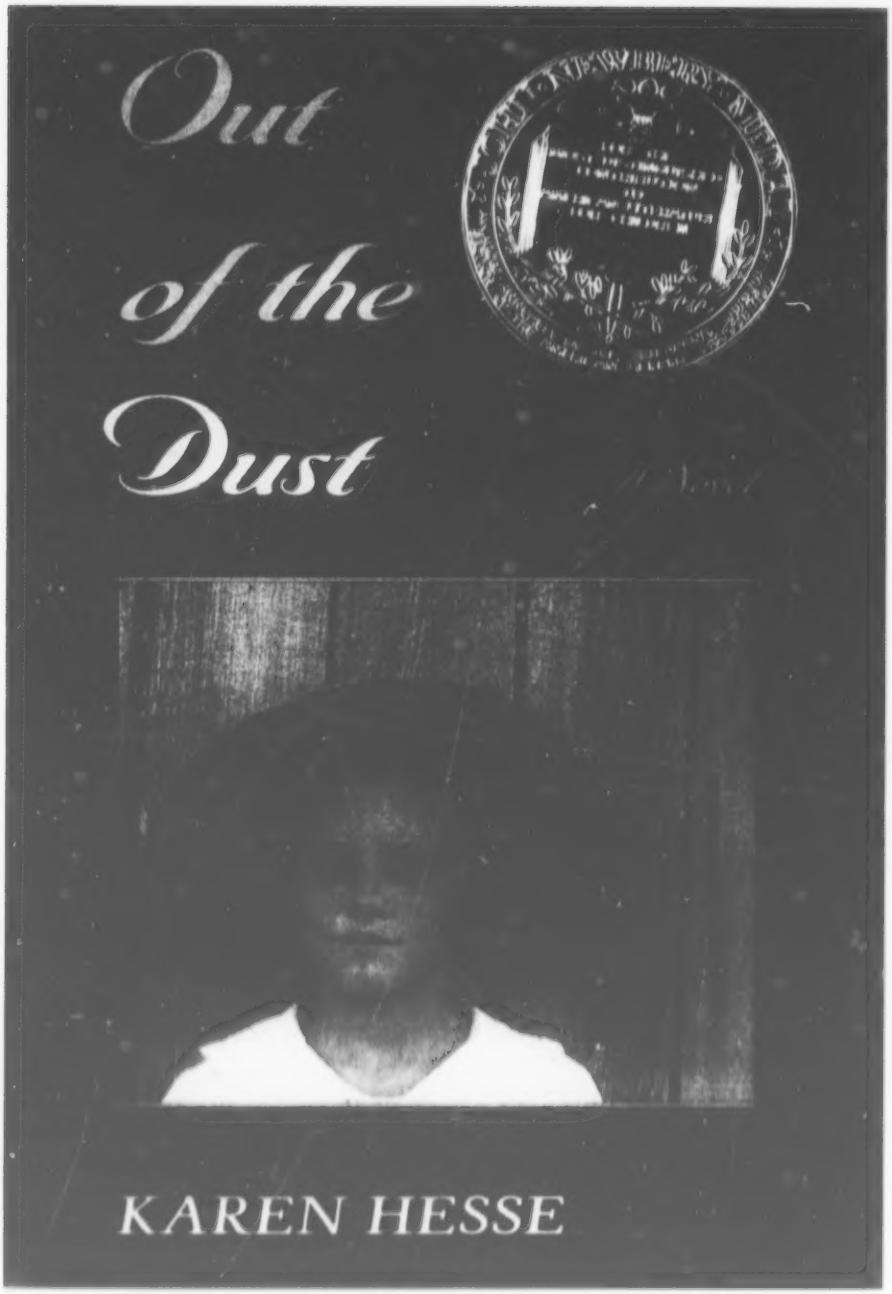
vividly portrays her maturing emotions, from desolation to longing to hope, as she grows to maturity.

In *Out of the Dust*, the writing style is as important and evocative as its content. Hesse made the somewhat unusual decision to write *Out of the Dust* in the form of free verse poetry, rather than regular prose. She explained that the simple, spare phrases of poetry seemed to fit well with Billie Jo's experiences. "I knew who she was, how she would speak, how she perceived her world. Everything is so spare, so much energy spent on just survival. To represent them in an honest way, I needed the language to reflect that spareness." For Hesse, that poetic style was essential. "I never attempted to write this book any other way than in free verse. The frugality of life, the hypnotically hard work of farming, the grimness of conditions during the dust bowl, demanded an economy of words. Daddy and Ma and Billie Jo's rawboned life translated into poetry, and bless Scholastic [the publisher] for honoring that translation and producing *Out of the Dust* with the spare understatement I sought when writing it."

"I never attempted to write **[Out of the Dust]** *any other way than in free verse. The frugality of life, the hypnotically hard work of farming, the grimness of conditions during the dust bowl, demanded an economy of words. Daddy and Ma and Billie Jo's rawboned life translated into poetry, and bless Scholastic [the publisher] for honoring that translation and producing* **Out of the Dust** *with the spare understatement I sought when writing it."*

In *Out of the Dust*, Hesse openly faces many difficult topics, including death, poverty, hunger, and homelessness. It's important, she says, to present these issues to young people in a realistic way. "Occasionally, adult readers grimace at the events documented in *Out of the Dust*," she admitted. "They ask, how can this book be for young readers? I ask, how can it not? The children I have met during my travels around the country have astounded me with their perception, their intelligence, their capacity to take in information and apply it to a greater picture, or take in the greater picture and distill it down to what they need from it. Young readers are asking for substance. They are asking for respect. They are asking for books that challenge, and confirm, and console. They are asking for us to listen to their questions and help them



find their own answers." Her goal has always been to make readers think, Hesse says, rather than tell them what to think. She writes realistic stories for children who feel isolated, like she once did, so they will know that they are not alone in dealing with their problems. "My hope is to help

them through hard times, to present characters who survive ordeals and grow as a result of them," she stated.

The 1998 Newbery Medal

Out of the Dust was widely hailed by readers and critics as powerful and compelling when it was published. Reviewers praised the moving and memorable imagery as well as the lyrical quality of the free verse. They called the distinctive writing style remarkably successful in depicting the family's difficult life. That style, many said, evocatively portrayed Bille Jo's expressive voice.

"I love writing. I can't wait to get to my desk every morning. I wish everyone felt that way about their chosen profession."

The novel won many awards, including the 1998 John Newbery Medal. The Newbery, the highest honor in children's book publishing, is given each year by the American Library Association for the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children. According to Ellen Fader, the chair of the committee that selected *Out of the Dust* as the Newbery winner, "Hesse's painstaking first-person narration of Billie Jo's withering and, finally taking root, is spare and gritty. She creates a stark and piercing rhythm with free-verse form that naturally and immediately communicates this story of Billie Jo's fierce spirit and growing self-understanding."

Recent Work

Following *Out of the Dust*, Hesse has recently completed a new book. *Just Juice* (1998), a novel with a more conventional narrative style than her previous work, tells the story of nine-year-old Justus Faulstich. Juice, as she's known, is growing up in a poor family facing a lot of troubles: her father is out of work, her mother is pregnant with her sixth baby and having dizzy spells, the family owes $1,000 in taxes, and Juice is repeating the third grade because she can't read. It's an affecting portrait of a young girl and her loving family facing—and overcoming—serious hardships.

Hesse continues to enjoy writing, which she has worked on full-time since 1991, when her first book was published. She works in her home studio from eight in the morning until the evening, barely taking a break for lunch. "I love writing," she said. "I can't wait to get to my desk every morning. I wish everyone felt that way about their chosen profession."

ADVICE TO YOUNG WRITERS

Hesse often gives talks about books and writing at schools and bookstores. When asked for advice, she always tells students that reading books is an important part of being a good writer, as is practicing. "Write every day," she says. "The more you use the writing muscle, the better developed it will become."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Karen and Randy Hesse were married on November 27, 1971. They have two daughters, Kate (born in 1979) and Rachel (born in 1982), and they continue to live in Brattleboro, Vermont.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

When she is not writing, Hesse enjoys reading, traveling, hiking in the woods near her home, and spending time with loved ones. She also likes to "tinker a little" on musical instruments. Even though she only had a few weeks of piano lessons as a girl, she says that if she had not become a writer she would have been a conductor. "I cannot imagine anything more thrilling than lifting a baton into the air and bringing forth from a collection of people and instruments a beautiful symphony," she once said.

WRITINGS

Wish on a Unicorn, 1991
Letters from Rifka, 1992
Lester's Dog, 1993
Poppy's Chair, 1993
Lavender, 1993
Sable, 1994
Phoenix Rising, 1994
A Time of Angels, 1995
The Music of Dolphins, 1996
Out of the Dust, 1997
Just Juice, 1998

SELECTED HONORS AND AWARDS

Christopher Medal: 1992, for *Letters from Rifka*
Sydney Taylor Book Award: 1992, for *Letters from Rifka*
Mildred L. Batchelder Award (American Library Association): 1993, for *Letters from Rifka*

National Jewish Book Award: 1993, for *Letters from Rifka*
Best Book of the Year (*School Library Journal*): 1995, for *Sable;* 1997, for *The Music of Dolphins;* 1998, for *Out of the Dust*
Best Book for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1995, for *Phoenix Rising;* 1997, for *The Music of Dolphins*
Golden Kite Honor Book: 1997, for *The Music of Dolphins*
Best Book of the Year (*Publishers Weekly*): 1997, for *The Music of Dolphins;* 1998, for *Out of the Dust*
Newbery Medal (American Library Association): 1998, for *Out of the Dust*
Notable Children's Book (American Library Association): 1998, for *Out of the Dust*
Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction: 1998, for *Out of the Dust*

FURTHER READING

Books

Something about the Author, Vol. 74, 1993
Something about the Author Autobiography Series, Vol. 25, 1998
Who's Who in America, 1998

Periodicals

Akron Beacon-Journal, July 12, 1998, p.F8
Boston Globe, Mar. 15, 1998, p.F2
Horn Book, July/Aug. 1998, pp.422 and 428
Oregonian, Feb. 12, 1998, p.D2
Washington Post, Jan. 13, 1998, p.C1

Videotapes

Good Conversation! A Talk with Karen Hesse, 1998

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www.ala.org/alsc/newbery.html

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Brian Jacques 1939-

English Author, Playwright, and Radio Host
Author of the *Redwall* Series of Fantasy/Adventure Novels for Young Adults

BIRTH

Brian Jacques (pronounced "jakes") was born in Liverpool, England, on June 15, 1939. He was the second of three sons born to James Jacques, a truck driver, and Ellen Jacques, a homemaker. Brian has an older brother, Tony, and a younger brother, Jimmy.

YOUTH

Brian Jacques was raised in Liverpool, an industrial port city in northwestern England, on the Irish Sea. "I really grew up by the docks of Liverpool, which is a tough place," he recalled. He was born just as World War II was beginning in Europe, and the war affected his childhood in many ways. German warplanes sometimes filled the sky, dropping bombs on his hometown. He knew of men who went to war and never came home, and ships that went to sea and never returned. His working-class family faced many hardships and often struggled to survive. Even after World War II ended in 1945, Jacques remembered that "everything in England was in short supply, I mean, proper fruit wasn't available for years." During these difficult times, the Jacques family resorted to eating such dishes as scouse, a cheap stew with almost no meat.

Jacques relied on books and his imagination to take his mind off of his constant hunger. Even though James Jacques was a laborer and had never finished school, he still encouraged his children to read. As a child, Brian was influenced by the great adventure stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (author of the Sherlock Holmes mysteries), Robert Louis Stevenson (*Treasure Island*), Edgar Rice Burroughs (*Tarzan of the Apes*), Zane Grey (*Riders of the Purple Sage*), and Sir Henry Rider Haggard (*King Solomon's Mines*). One of his favorite books as a boy was *The Iliad*, an epic war story by the ancient Greek poet Homer. It made a deep impression on the future story teller. "The language in that—oh! Words are great things," Jacques recalled. "The music. The poetry. The fire, the anger, the joy, the laughter."

One disappointing aspect of the books Jacques read as a child was that they never seemed to include enough food details to satisfy the hungry boy. When he read stories where kings gave feasts, for example, he wondered, "Wait a minute What did they eat? Was it any good?" So he decided that "if I ever wrote a book, I'd tell you what they ate and how they made it." In fact, Jacques has called upon his childhood memories again and again when describing the fantastic, elaborate dinners enjoyed by the characters of his books. A typical Redwall feast might include flat, crisp oatmeal bannocks, early-spring vegetable soup, and apple, blackberry, and plum crumble topped with greensap and maple sauce. When an editor suggested cutting one of the feast scenes, Jacques replied, "Madam, how dare you? A Redwall feast is a Redwall feast."

EDUCATION

Education was not considered very important by working-class families in Liverpool during the difficult period following World War II. In fact, most

boys were expected to quit school by the time they reached their teens so they could begin working to help support their families. Despite this lack of emphasis on education, however, Jacques loved school, and his ability to write was evident at an early age. When he was ten years old, Jacques was assigned to write a story about animals for a class at St. John's School in Liverpool. He wrote about a bird that cleaned the teeth of a crocodile. The story was so good that his teacher did not believe he wrote it, and he was whipped for "lying."

At the age of 15, Jacques was told that he was too old to remain in school any longer. He dropped out and went to sea as part of the crew of a merchant ship. He later claimed that he got his education in the real world at the "University of Life."

BECOMING A WRITER

Jacques never planned to become a famous writer. In fact, he tried many different careers before he started to write adventure stories, including truck driver, policeman, docker (longshoreman), stand-up comedian, folk singer, sailor, postmaster, playwright, poet, journalist, and radio host. One of his many jobs was to deliver milk to the Royal Wavertree School for the Blind. Eventually, he became a school patron and dedicated himself to reading to the children. Jacques did not like the stories he was given to read to the children, however, so he began to write his own. He regularly showed up at the school with a grocery bag containing a home-spun tale. These early writings were were vivid, fantastic stories that helped the children escape to distant, medieval lands in their imaginations.

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> *Jacques often escaped the harsh industrial squalor of Liverpool by spending time in nearby Stanley Park. Amidst beautiful fields and flowers was a "huge, old, red sandstone wall," he recalled. "It looked nice, in the summer, and I used to imagine it was some kind of castle. And that was the start of Redwall Abbey." Just as the park provided comfort to Jacques as an imaginative young adult, the Redwall books provide comfort to his young readers. "No one has to be a latchkey kid at Redwall; there's plenty of friends and warmth and cheerfulness, with big guardian badgers. Kids love to go there; it's an ideal home."*
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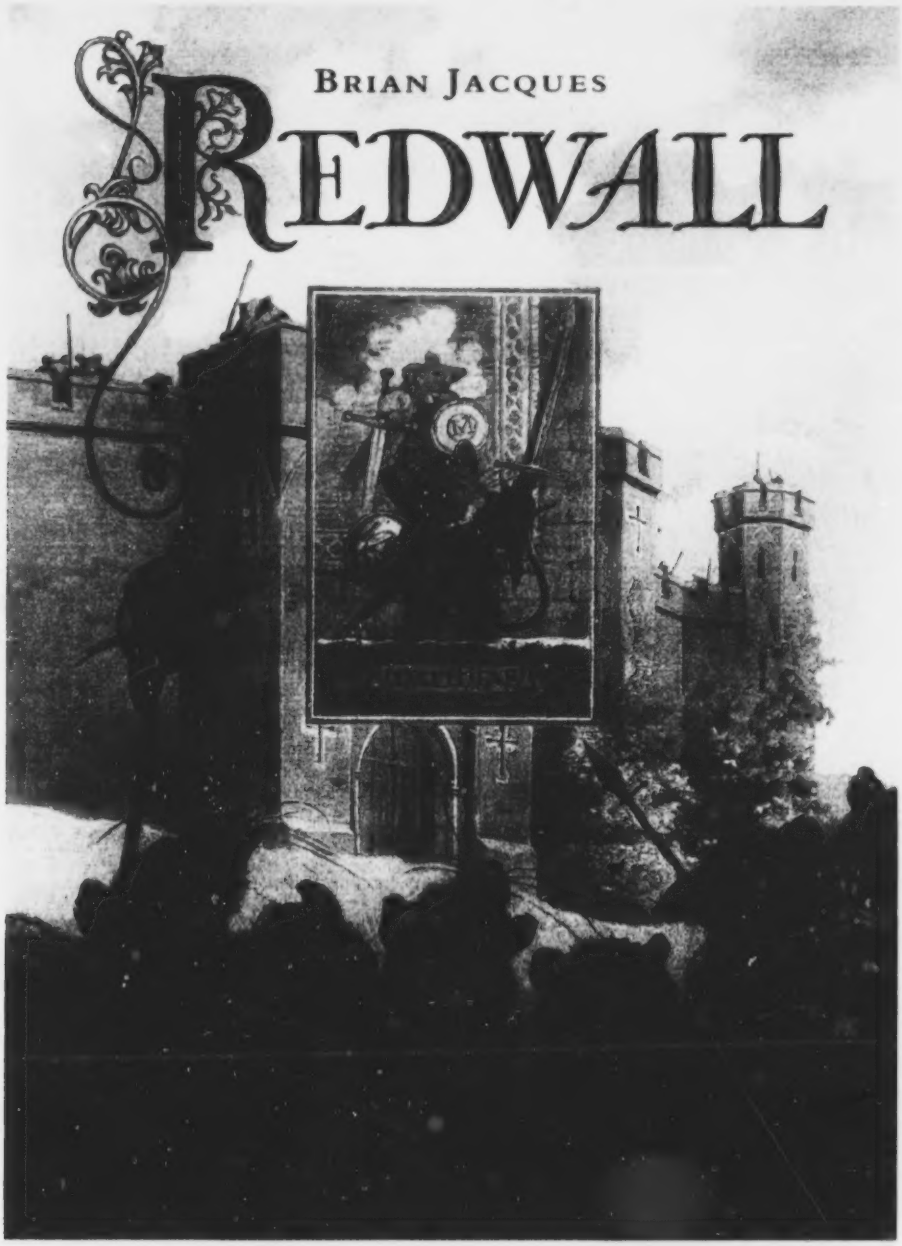

One day, Alan Durband—a retired English teacher, published author, and Jacques's good friend—read one of his stories. Durband sent the manuscript to his publisher, and the publisher liked it. The story that had given the blind children so much pleasure was published in 1986 as *Redwall,* and the series was born.

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CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Jacques was in his forties by the time he became a published author, but the idea for the setting of the *Redwall* series actually came to him as a teenager. He often escaped the harsh industrial squalor of Liverpool by spending time in nearby Stanley Park. Amidst beautiful fields and flowers was a "huge, old, red sandstone wall," he recalled. "It looked nice, in the summer, and I used to imagine it was some kind of castle. And that was the start of Redwall Abbey." Just as the park provided comfort to Jacques as an imaginative young adult, the *Redwall* books provide comfort to his young readers. "No one has to be a latchkey kid at Redwall; there's plenty of friends and warmth and cheerfulness, with big guardian badgers," he stated. "Kids love to go there; it's an ideal home." Jacques has also used many of his childhood memories of war in the series, and based most of the characters on people he knew.

> ***"Everybody doesn't live happily ever after in my books; there is life and death in them," the author noted. "But as in life, if you have a friend that you loved and that friend dies, then he or she will always live in your memory."***

The *Redwall* books are epic adventure tales of good versus evil. All of the main characters are animals. The heroes are mice, hares, badgers, and other agents of good. The villains include bilge rats, horderats, sea rats, weasels, foxes, snakes, and ferrets. The heroes must continually fight to survive and to defend themselves and their land against the "badbeasts." Good always prevails in Redwall, even if there is a price to pay, and evil is vanquished, even if the bad guys get away. Jacques feels that readers of all ages can identify with his characters, who must overcome obstacles, fight evil, and come-of-age. "To become a warrior doesn't mean that [the character] has to become Arnold Schwarzenegger," he stated. "You don't have to become a bully to stand up to a bully. To be a warrior is to be someone who can be trusted, someone who speaks the truth, someone who is respected by his or her friends."

Jacques creates suspenseful stories that lead his characters from one exciting adventure to another. The characters often find themselves changed by their experiences. This realistic touch, which adds a level of credibility to the characters, is one of the reasons many young people find these books so enthralling. "Everybody doesn't live happily ever after in my

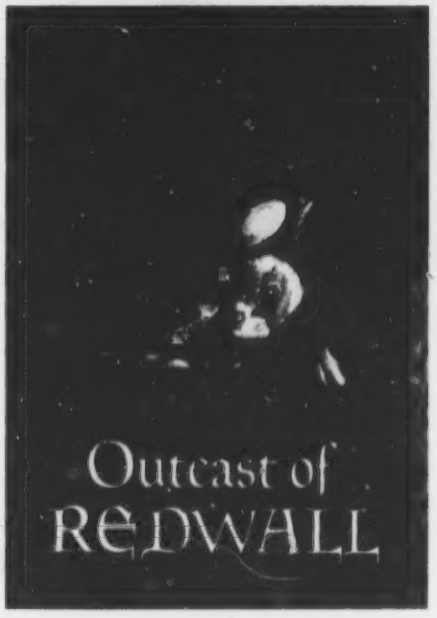
books; there is life and death in them," the author noted. "But as in life, if you have a friend that you loved and that friend dies, then he or she will always live in your memory." Although there is violence in the *Redwall* books, Jacques is careful to place it in context. "If the 'baddy' uses violence, it's to show you how evil he is, and if the 'goody' resorts to violence it's to show you that, although he doesn't like violence, he will defend his friends and his home," he explained.

The animal groups in the *Redwall* series are based on people Jacques has known. The hares in Redwall are the swagger-stepping Royal Air Force types who saved the day in World War II. The shrews, who argue and fight, are based on the longshoremen Jacques worked with as a youth. Basil Stag Hare is based on one of Jacques's bosses, Captain Kenny Dixon, who had a big pouchy face and bristling mustache, and would always say, "Come on, Brian, up off your big fat bum; nip about a bit, quick's the word, sharp's the action. What! What! Jolly good!" Characters based on Jacques and his wife, Liz, also appear in the series. Gonff, Prince of Mousethieves, is based on Jacques himself, and Cornflower is based on his wife.

Although there is violence in the Redwall books, Jacques is careful to place it in context. "If the 'baddy' uses violence, it's to show you how evil he is, and if the 'goody' resorts to violence it's to show you that, although he doesn't like violence, he will defend his friends and his home."

The first book in the series is *Redwall*, published in 1986. It tells the story of Matthias, a young resident of Redwall Abbey. The inhabitants of the abbey enjoy rewarding communal work and trademark Redwall feasts. Their carefree existence continues until Cluny the Scourge and his band of vermin terrorize their way into the abbey. When the abbots learn that Cluny is on the way, they initially decide to run. But Matthias convinces them to stay and protect the abbey. Matthias then happens upon an archaic riddle written by Martin the Warrior, founder of Redwall Abbey, whose spirit watches over the inhabitants of Redwall. He hopes that the riddle will lead him to the sword of the long-dead Martin, which will help him to defeat Cluny's troops. He solves the riddle and learns that he is actually Martin's descendant. Matthias eventually finds and retrieves the sword from warlike sparrows, who have kept it hidden in the abbey's tower. In the meantime, Cluny makes several attempts to overthrow the abbey and finally succeeds through trickery. But

Matthias and the creatures of Redwall battle back, and Matthias forces a fatal confrontation between the two leaders.

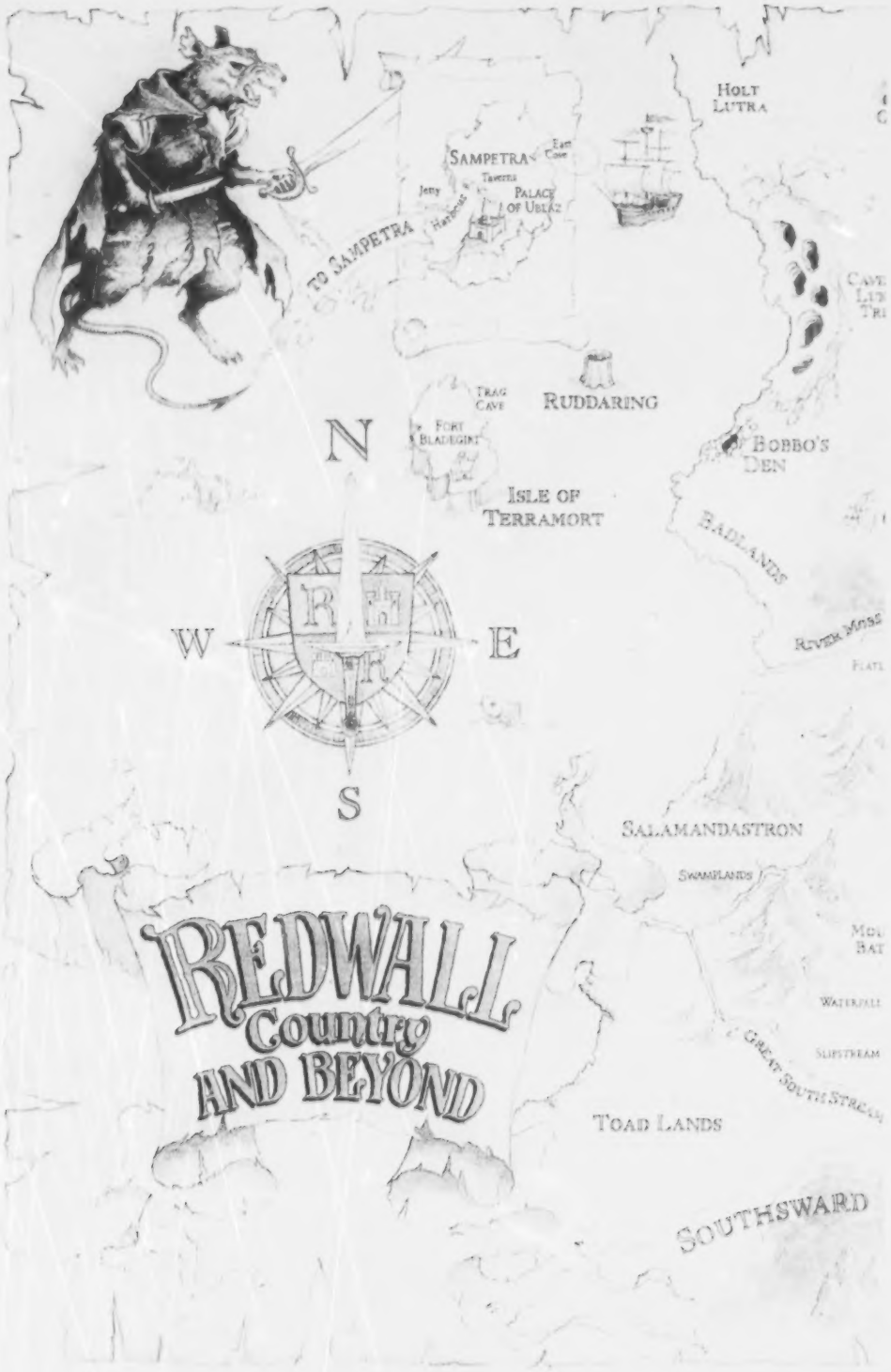


Jacques has continued the saga of Redwall in 10 additional books. In such later volumes as *Mossflower* and *Martin the Warrior* Jacques goes back in time to tell the story of Martin. Other books in the series, *Mariel of Redwall* and *The Bellmaker*, feature Mariel, a brave female mouse loyal to the denizens of Redwall. Still other volumes, including *Pearls of Lutra* and *Mattimeo*, focus on the adventures of the descendants of Matthias.

Success of the *Redwall* Series

In the early years of the *Redwall* series, Jacques and his wife toured schools around England and the United States to promote the stories. These efforts paid off, as he gained a following of young readers who have stayed with him as they grew older. As of today, the *Redwall* series has been published in 18 countries and in 14 different languages. Jacques's books have sold over 1.5 million copies in America and about the same number in England. When Jacques appears at bookstores, his fans cheer like he is a rock star. When he reads from his books, children hang on every word, spoken in character, and boo the villains with enthusiasm.

Many of the books in the *Redwall* series are available in paperback and on audio cassette. In addition, a Welsh television company is currently producing a 13-part series of half-hour programs that should eventually be available worldwide on video. Jacques has also written a screenplay for a *Redwall* movie, which will be produced and released in the future. A CD-ROM of *Redwall* is also in development. However, Jacques has rejected offers to turn the *Redwall* series into a video game. He feels that his books are about growth and adventure rather than violence, and he does not want to see his work reduced to crushed vermin and magic swords. "If years from now, when all the pretty dust-jackets have fallen off, all the CD-ROMs and videos are full of dust, and some kid stumbles across a dog-eared copy of one of my books—and enjoys it—well, that's how I'd like to be remembered," he explained.



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"Paint. That's the magic word. Paint pictures with words. That's the greatest advice I can give to anybody. Paint the pictures with words. The picture will appear in the imagination so the person reading it can say, 'I can see that.'"

Finding Creative Inspiration

Jacques sometimes conducts research to provide realistic details in his vivid adventure stories. For example, he might read books to find out what trees will bloom in certain seasons. But the real source of these adventures is his graphic imagination. "When I get a feeling that I want to write again I just take my West Highland terrier and go to Stanley Park and I wander with my dog and the juices start to flow and then I get out my pens and paper and my old manual typewriter and begin," he noted. Jacques often works out in his garden, where he enjoys sipping tea among the apple trees and lilac bushes. He writes rain or shine, and often submits rain-splashed pages with tea stains, paw-prints, and mashed flower pedals on them to his publisher.

Jacques believes that he knows the secret to successful writing. "Paint. That's the magic word. Paint pictures with words," he stated. "That's the greatest advice I can give to anybody. Paint the pictures with words. The picture will appear in the imagination so the person reading it can say, 'I can see that.'"

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Brian Jacques lives with his wife, Liz, in Liverpool. The Jacques have two adult sons, David and Marc, and one granddaughter, Jade. Jacques wrote *Mariel of Redwall* for Jade in 1991, and dedicated *The Great Redwall Feast* to her in 1995.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

In addition to his work as an author, Jacques continues to host a BBC Sunday radio program, "Jakestown," which was on the air before his first book was published. In his spare time, he enjoys walking his West Highland terrier, Baby Mac. He also listens to opera and classical music and does crossword puzzles. Still an avid reader, Jacques particularly enjoys the works of Mario Puzo, Damon Runyon, Richard Condon, Larry McMurtry, and P.G. Wodehouse.

HONORS AND AWARDS

National Light Entertainment for Radio (Sony Corporation): 1982, for BBC-Radio Merseyside's "Jakestown"
Rediffusion Award for Best Light Entertainment Program (Local BBC): 1982
Best Books for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1987, for *Redwall*
Best Book (*School Library Journal*): 1987, for *Redwall*
Parents' Choice Honor Book for Literature: 1987, for *Redwall*
Editor's Choice Award (*Booklist*): 1987, for *Redwall*
Children's Book of the Year Award (Lancashire County Library, England): 1988, for *Redwall*
Western Austrailia's Young Reader's Award: 1991, for *Mossflower*

WRITINGS

Redwall Series

Redwall, 1986
Mossflower, 1988
Mattimeo, 1989
Mariel of Redwall, 1991
Salamandastron, 1992
Martin the Warrior, 1993
The Bellmaker, 1994
Outcast of Redwall, 1995
Pearls of Lutra, 1996
The Long Patrol, 1997
Marlfox, 1998

Other

Seven Strange and Ghostly Tales, 1991

FURTHER READING

Books

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Gary Soto 1952-

American Poet, Essayist, and Writer of Young Adult Fiction

Author of *The Elements of San Joaquin* and *Baseball in April*

BIRTH

Gary Soto was born in Fresno, California, on April 12, 1952. His parents, Manuel Soto and Angie (Trevino) Soto, were born in America, but Gary's grandparents had come from Mexico. Like most Mexican-Americans living in the area around Fresno, both his parents and his grandparents had worked in the fields of the fertile San Joaquin Valley picking

grapes, oranges, and cotton. When Gary was a young child, his father packed boxes at the Sun Maid Raisin Company, and his mother peeled potatoes for a company called Redi-Spuds. He has an older brother, Rick, and a younger sister, Debra.

YOUTH

The Soto family lived on the west side of Fresno in a predominantly poor and Hispanic neighborhood. For the first six years of his life, Gary lived in an ugly, industrial part of town, across the street from a pickle factory and next door to a junkyard. Then, in the early 1960s, the federal government decided to tear down his neighborhood as part of an urban renewal program, forcing the Sotos and many other Mexican-American families to leave their homes. The effort to revitalize the community didn't work, however. The houses were bulldozed, but nothing was built instead, and only weeds grew in their place. The feeling of loss that Gary experienced was so intense that for years afterward, he dreamed of returning to his old neighborhood and rebuilding it.

> *"I don't think I had any literary aspirations when I was a kid. In fact, we were pretty much an illiterate family. We didn't have books, and no one encouraged us to read. So my wanting to write poetry was sort of a fluke."*

Just a few months after moving his family to a different neighborhood on the outskirts of Fresno, Manuel Soto was involved in a freak accident at work. A co-worker who was carrying some construction materials up a ladder fell on top of Manuel, which broke his neck and killed him. He was only 27. Angie Soto was left to raise her three children, with the help of their grandparents. She eventually remarried, and two stepbrothers joined the family. But Gary's new stepfather was an alcoholic. He and Angie spent a lot of their time fighting, leaving Gary and his siblings to fend for themselves. Gary was a mischievous young boy who got into his share of trouble. His mother used to say that her highest hope for him was that he would stay out of prison.

FIRST JOBS

Soto started working when he was just a young boy. He started out working in the fields of the San Joaquin Valley, cutting grapes and chopping cotton. When he was a little older, he worked at a car wash and as a land-

scape gardener. But it was his early experiences as a field worker that gave Soto first-hand knowledge of the hardships endured by so many of the Chicano people living in California's agricultural areas.

EDUCATION

Gary attended the local public schools in Fresno. At Roosevelt High School, he was never a good student and took more interest in sports than studying. He had a D average throughout most of his high school years, but he managed to graduate in 1970. After high school, he was accepted at Fresno City College, where he majored in geography. One day when he was in the library working on a research paper, he discovered an anthology called *The New American Poetry,* edited by Donald Allen and Robert Creeley. He was particularly drawn to a poem by Edward Field called "Unwanted," which perfectly expressed his own feelings of alienation from mainstream American society. He decided right then and there that writing poetry was something he wanted to try.

After receiving an associate's degree from Fresno City College in 1972, Soto transferred to California State University at Fresno, where he studied literature. There he enrolled in a creative writing class taught by Philip Levine. At that time, Levine was already a well-established American poet whose work described the harsh realities of urban life. His poems about the working poor and his spare, highly crafted writing style were Soto's introduction to what it meant to be a poet. Levine was impressed by his young student's dedication and willingness to do the hard work of writing and re-writing that poetry requires. He taught Soto "the nuts and bolts of how to read a poem" and how to master the technical side of writing by shaping language into poetry. In 1974, Soto graduated with a bachelor of arts (BA) degree, magna cum laude (with high honors), from California State University, Fresno. He went on to earn a master of fine arts degree (MFA) in creative writing from the University of California at Irvine in 1976.

BECOMING A WRITER AND TEACHER

Soto first became interested in becoming a writer while he was still a student at Fresno City College. There, he discovered the "Beat" poets, including Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Allen Ginsberg. Their work sparked his interest in trying to write his own poems. By the time he reached graduate school at the University of California at Irvine, he was publishing his poems in such prestigious magazines as *Poetry, The Nation,* and *The New Yorker*. This early success as a poet came as a surprise to everyone, including Soto himself. "I don't think I had any literary aspira-

tions when I was a kid," he admitted later. "In fact, we were pretty much an illiterate family. We didn't have books, and no one encouraged us to read. So my wanting to write poetry was sort of a fluke."

Soto spent time after receiving his MFA as a visiting writer at San Diego State University. By 1976 he had started teaching at the University of California at Berkeley, and his career as a poet and a teacher of English and Chicano literature was well under way.

"I like to think of my poems as a 'working life,' by which I mean that my poems are about commonplace, everyday things—baseball, an evening walk, a boyhood friendship, first love, fatherhood, a tree, rock 'n roll, the homeless, dancing. The poems keep alive the small moments which add up to a large moment: life itself."

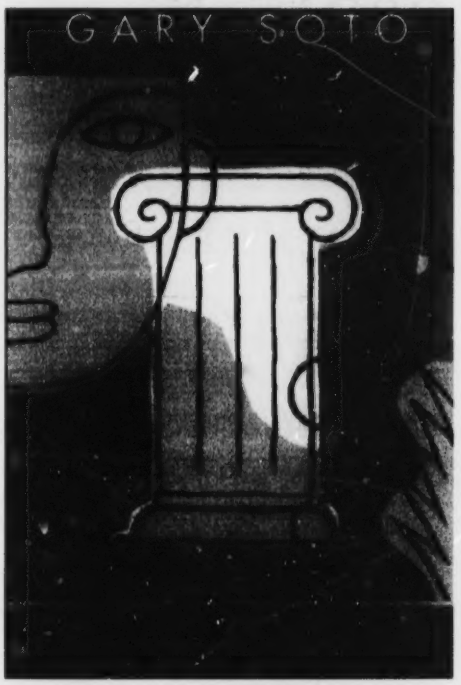
In fact, throughout much of his subsequent career as a writer, Soto has also been a teacher. He continued teaching literature and creative writing for many years at the University of California at Berkeley, eventually becoming chairman of the department of Chicano studies and senior lecturer in English. He also served as the Elliston Poet at the University of Cincinnati in 1988 and the Martin Luther King/Cesar Chavez/Rosa Parks Visiting Professor of English at Wayne State University in Detroit in 1990. In 1993 he decided to leave teaching to become a full-time writer.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

During his prolific writing career, which now spans over 20 years, Soto has written works in a variety of genres and for a variety of age groups. He started out writing poetry for adults, then tried his hand at autobiographical memoirs in a prose format. Later, Soto added writing for children to his repertoire, crafting short stories, poems, and novels for young readers as well as teens. In all these varied formats, Soto's works reflect a deep concern with narration and character development. His autobiographical musings on his early life, in both poetry and prose, realistically portray the inequalities of life, showing the poverty and violence and backbreaking work that life holds for many Hispanics. Yet his writings also transcend the specifics of his own experiences to become universal.

"From the earliest days," according to Joseph Parisi, the editor of *Poetry* magazine, "there was a freshness about his work—a directness, a particularly effective use of imagery. And the tone of voice was extremely en-

gaging. A lot of people try to write about childhood when they're adults who don't have a very good grasp or effective memory. They can't quite capture the innocence or sense of adventure and misadventure of youth quite the way he does."



The Elements of San Joaquin

Soto's first book of poems, *The Elements of San Joaquin* (1977), draws heavily on his experiences growing up in the *barrio* (a Hispanic neighborhood) and working in the fields of the San Joaquin Valley in California. The book is divided into three sections: the first section presents images of Fresno in the 1950s, the second section explores agricultural life in the Valley, and the third section draws on the poet's childhood memories. As a whole, the book presents a grim portrait of the lives of Mexican-Americans who work in the fields and factories all day and come home to confront the poverty and violence of urban life. Without the use of rhyme, meter, and other conventional poetic devices, Soto manages to capture the essence of the migrant farm workers' life and their struggle to achieve something beyond the drudgery of their daily routine.

The Elements of San Joaquin brought the plight of California's Chicano community to the attention of the reading public, and the book won several awards. At the same time, it focused attention on Soto. Although he was only 26 years old, Soto was immediately hailed as a new poet to watch.

The Tale of Sunlight

Like *The Elements of San Joaquin,* Soto's second book of poems, *The Tale of Sunlight* (1978), also employs a three-part structure. The first group of poems is about childhood and features Molina, a character from his first book who acts as the poet's companion or guide as he journeys through a landscape of poverty and hunger. The second part traces the poet's travels in Latin America and his experiences with a *brujo,* or man of spiritual

> *"[Although] the experiences in my stories, poems, and novels may seem autobiographical, much of what I write is the stuff of the imagination. . . . That is, as a writer I make things up, provided that the actions of the characters are reasonably human and, thus, believable. . . ."*

power, while the third part tells the story of Manuel Zaragoza, an unhappy cantina owner in Mexico who imagines that his life is transformed by magical events. This last section reflects Soto's experiences while visiting Mexico and his interest in the "magical realism" literature of Latin America. In fact, critics compared the poems in this book to the work of both Gabriel García Marquez and Carlos Castaneda, two well-known Latin American writers who practice "magical realism."

The Tale of Sunlight was praised for the way in which Soto used imagination to temper the bleakness that dominated Soto's first book of poems. Although these poems still explore the frustrations of poverty, they also display what one critic called an "imaginative generosity toward life," and the book ends on a note of hope rather than one of despair.

Other Poetry for Adults

After the success of these two volumes, Soto continued to write poetry for adults. His next collection, *Where Sparrows Work Hard* (1981), focuses on life in and around Fresno. It is filled with "slice of life" poems that contrast the consumer-oriented society of the middle class with the urban world of alcoholics, drifters, petty criminals, and illegal aliens. The poems in this book are less thematic and more spontaneous than those in his earlier works. *Black Hair* (1985), Soto's next full-length collection, deals primarily with childhood and death. There are poems about his own experiences as an adolescent and as the father of a young daughter. Unlike the despair and social criticism that characterized his earlier books, *Black Hair* presents a world focused on love. Although it was not well received by the critics, this book is considered significant. In it, Soto transcends the cultural boundaries of his childhood and explores themes that are common not only to Hispanics, but to humanity as a whole.

In the mid 1980s Soto began writing works in other genres, but at the same time he has continued to publish several works of poetry for adults. These include the collection *Who Will Know Us?* (1990), poems rooted in a

sense of place that candidly and directly question what it means to be a Chicano poet in California. According to the reviewer Hector Torres, "Soto crafts each of his poems with care and precision, writing each one in a narrative syntax that balances subtlety of expression with elegance of style." That was followed by *Home Course in Religion* (1991), a meditative collection of poetry that serves as a spiritual autobiography, exploring the religious dimensions of many of his early experiences. In *New and Selected Poems* (1995), Soto included both poems from his earlier volumes and new works, to excellent effect. As Rochelle Ratner wrote, "With rare lyricism, gentleness, and a touch of humor, Soto has it all—the learned craft, the intrinsic abilities with language, a fascinating autobiography, and the storyteller's ability to manipulate memories into folklore." Both *New and Selected Poems* and Soto's next poetry collection for adults, *Junior College* (1997),were nominated for the National Book Award, an important honor. In *Junior College*, he explores the limits that discrimination can impose on a person and his own efforts to break free from the stereotypes he faced growing up.

Soto's body of work, critics say, reflects the changes that have taken place in poetry over the past few decades. There has been a gradual transformation from concern with rhyme, specific poetic forms, and traditional literary devices to an emphasis on less structured narratives and multicultural themes. Like many other poets of his generation, Soto writes poems that often read like fiction. But he shows a gift for precise images that perfectly capture the poverty, fear, and isolation faced by minorities while at the same time emphasizing the relationships that hold their families and communities together. These images have set Soto's work apart and made him the most widely known Chicano poet in America.

"I like to think of my poems as a 'working life,'" Soto says, "by which I mean that my poems are about commonplace, everyday things—baseball, an evening walk, a boyhood

> *"The business of the writer is not to immerse himself or herself in the mainstream but to step back and observe, to rearrange, to tamper with reality to create new possibilities. In short, not all of my work is autobiographical, but it could be. To me the finest praise is when a reader says, 'I can see your stories.' This is what I'm always working for, a story that becomes alive and meaningful in the reader's mind."*

friendship, first love, fatherhood, a tree, rock 'n roll, the homeless, dancing. The poems keep alive the small moments which add up to a large moment: life itself."

Living Up the Street and Other Autobiographical Prose Works

In addition to his poetry, Soto has written several volumes of autobiographical memoirs in prose form. These essays have proven to be popular with both adults and teenage readers. "I'd never considered myself a prose writer," he says, "but I wanted to do something different." For Soto, writing prose represented a type of freedom. "I felt I could be louder, more direct, also sloppier, whereas with poetry, I believed you had to control your statement, not be so obvious." These collections, as Don Lee wrote in *Ploughshares*, "presented something else that was different: a more mature, ironic, and humorous view of his childhood, finding celebrations of joy amid the hardships of growing up in the *barrio*."

Soto's collections of prose memoirs include *Living Up the Street: Narrative Recollections* (1984), essays based on his experiences from boyhood through marriage; *Small Faces* (1986), memoirs about his adolescence through fatherhood that often deal with the issues of poverty and class differences; *Lesser Evils: Ten Quartets* (1988), autobiographical essays, arranged in quartets, in which the four parts of the quartet explore the same theme from different angles; and *A Summer Life* (1990), which shares his recollections of summertime during his childhood in Fresno. Soto's autobiographical memoirs effectively show readers the joy in life, but also the impact of poverty and discrimination—playing barefoot in the shade during the hot summertime; eating ripe fruit, the juice running down his arm; dreaming of new clothes and new toys, rather than hand-me-downs; backbreaking labor in the fields in the hot sun. As Ted Fabiano wrote in *Writers for Young Adults*, "Soto does not simply tell us about his experiences or despair about the plight of the poor. His power comes from showing, from painting pictures that allow the reader to feel the wonder, promise, and pain of everyday life."

Baseball in April

During the 1990s, Soto began publishing books aimed specifically at younger readers. That was a new and unexpected departure for Soto. After the publication of his prose memoirs, he had received letters from fans, including many written by Hispanic teenagers. Soto felt that these youngsters needed to see themselves and their lives reflected in the books they read. Publishers weren't interest in producing books about Hispanics, though, because they believed there was no market for them. But Soto's first book of this type, *Baseball in April, and Other Stories* (1990), was an immediate popular and critical success. After *Baseball in April* won glowing reviews and several major awards, Soto had no trouble finding publishers for his subsequent children's books. Since then, he has continued to devote much of his time to writing books for children and teens.

Baseball in April, which is still his best known book for younger readers, is a collection of 11 contemporary short stories about everyday events in a modern-day Mexican-American neighborhood. Each story focuses on a different child or adolescent living in California's San Joaquin Valley—such as Alfonso, who thinks he can transform himself from an awkward young boy to an Aztec warrior by doing 50 sit-ups a day, or Veronica, who is so pleased to finally receive a new Barbie, rather than a cheap imitation doll, but then loses the doll's head. The stories are sensitive, funny, and bittersweet, showing the characters' feelings of sadness, humiliation, and rejection as well as their strong, vital relationships within the family and community. In these stories, as well as in his subsequent writings for kids, Soto uses Spanish words and phrases that he explains in a glossary in the back of the book.

> ***For Soto, switching from poetry to prose represented a type of freedom. "I felt I could be louder, more direct, also sloppier, whereas with poetry, I believed you had to control your statement, not be so obvious."***

Other Works for Teens and Children

After the success of *Baseball in April,* Soto continued with novels and short stories for older children and young adults. *Taking Sides* (1991) is a novel about an eighth grade Chicano boy named Lincoln Mendoza. His loyalties are divided after he and his mother move from the *barrio,* a

Hispanic neighborhood in San Francisco's Mission District, to a wealthier white suburb. At his new school, Lincoln joins the basketball team and ends up playing against his old school's team. He worries about whether he will be considered a traitor by his friends from his former school. Soto continued Lincoln's story in *Pacific Crossing* (1992), in which he and a friend go to Japan as exchange students and face cultural challenges in a foreign setting. *Jesse* (1994) is a young adult novel about the lives of Hispanics in California during the late 1960s, a period of dramatic social and cultural upheaval. At just 16 years old, Jesse leaves home to get away from his drunken stepfather and create a new life for himself. He ends up living with his older brother, struggling with poverty, learning some hard lessons about discrimination, and finally discovering himself as an artist. Soto has said that *Jesse* is the book he is proudest of. The young adult novel *Buried Onions* (1997) sets a different tone. It offers a bleak and despairing look at Eddie, a 19-year-old Hispanic teen whose opportunities in his gang- and crime-ridden neighborhood seem hopeless. *Petty Crimes* (1998) is Soto's most recent fiction for kids in the middle grades. With compassion and empathy, the 10 short stories in this collection focus on young teenagers dealing with often difficult issues, like bullies, thievery, a relative with Alzheimer's disease, and the death of a parent. This stories in this collection clearly have a darker tone than his earlier stories in *Baseball in April*, showing the poverty, violence, and crime that are epidemic in urban life. As Soto described it, "*Petty Crimes* is about youth not using their minds or their bodies very well. And it is about the development of character."

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>
> — Ted Fabiano,
> *Writers for Young Adults*

Soto has also written several collections of poetry for kids. These show an upbeat attitude about life and a conscious effort to make his poems accessible to a younger audience. *A Fire in My Hands* (1991) is a book of poems focusing on situations that are common to children everywhere. Each poem is prefaced with a comment from Soto that explains its origins, making it easy for younger readers to understand and enjoy. In *Neighborhood Odes* (1992), the poems celebrate his Hispanic neighborhood in ode form,

paying tribute to such subjects as tortillas, tennis shoes, pinatas, and weddings. The poems in the follow-up companion volume, *Canto Familiar* (1996), illuminate the everyday experiences of childhood, like watching a father eating, getting gold stars in school, or accidentally getting locked up in toy handcuffs.

In addition, Soto has written several books for young children, including early chapter books and picture books for the youngest set. These feature charming, upbeat stories about young children, like *The Pool Party* (1992), an enjoyable story about a young Chicano boy who is invited to a pool party at the home of a wealthy school friend; *Too Many Tamales* (1993), a sweet and funny story about a young girl who thinks she has dropped her mother's wedding ring into the tamale dough while helping to prepare a big Christmas feast; and *Snapshots from the Wedding* (1996), a description of a Mexican-American wedding told by Maya, the five-year-old flower girl, replete with fascinating photographs of artfully arranged scenes of clay figures posed inside shadow boxes. Soto has even produced three short films for Spanish-speaking children: *The Bike* (1991), *The Pool Party* (1993), and *Novio Boy* (1994).

The Role of Autobiography and Imagination

Soto has said that he is often asked how much of his work is directly based on his own life. While his work is certainly autobiographical, it owes much to his imagination and to his skill as a writer, as he explains here. "[Although] the experiences in my stories, poems, and novels may seem autobiographical, much of what I write is the stuff of the imagination. . . . That is, as a writer I make things up, provided that the actions of the characters are reasonably human and, thus, believable. . . .

"The business of the writer is not to immerse himself or herself in the mainstream but to step back and observe, to rearrange, to tamper with reality, to create new possibilities. In short, not all of my work is autobio-

graphical, but it could be. To me the finest praise is when a reader says, 'I can *see* your stories.' This is what I'm always working for, a story that becomes alive and meaningful in the reader's mind."

ADVICE TO YOUNG WRITERS

Soto offers this advice to beginning writers: "I would say to a young student poet to write when he felt and not before, and to take his work seriously, not himself. And he should strive toward some kind of excellence—whatever that might mean to him. Don't just be okay. You've got to be better than that. If you want to be mediocre, go into pharmacy or business. Don't fool around with poetry."

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MAJOR INFLUENCES

Soto's earliest influences were what he describes as "very rambunctious, lively, irreverent writers" like Gregory Corso, Edward Field, and Kenneth Koch. Later on, his work was shaped by the poets Federico García Lorca, Charles Simic, W. S. Merwin, Octavio Paz, and Pablo Neruda, as well as the novelists Nathaniel West, Gabriel García Marquez, E. L. Doctorow, and Carlos Fuentes. But it was the poet Phillip Levine, his creative writing instructor from 1972 to 1973 at California State University, who had the most direct and immediate influence over Soto's development as a poet.

FAVORITE BOOKS

Soto considers the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Marquez "one of the greatest books of our time." García Marquez is probably the best-known member of the literary movement known as "magical realism," in which human existence is portrayed in magical and extraordinary terms. The overall effect of this approach is to make everyday surroundings seem unfamiliar. Soto dedicates one of the poems in *The Tale of Sunlight* to García Marquez, whose influence is most obvious in the "Manuel Zaragoza" poems of the book's third section.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Gary Soto married Carolyn Sadako Oda, the daughter of Japanese-American farmers, on May 24, 1975. They have one daughter, Mariko, born in about 1979.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

When he isn't writing, Soto enjoys reading, traveling, karate, and Aztec dancing. He has been interested in the martial arts since he was a young boy and holds a black belt in kendo, a stylized form of Japanese sword play.

At his church, Soto teaches English to Spanish-speaking children and participates in the Coalinga-Huron House project, an intensive six-week academic program for young people from California's Central Valley.

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Poetry for Adults

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The Tale of Sunlight, 1978
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Where Sparrows Work Hard, 1981
Black Hair, 1985
Who Will Know Us? 1990
Home Course in Religion, 1991
New & Selected Poems, 1995
Junior College, 1997

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Living Up the Street: Narrative Recollections, 1984
Small Faces, 1986
Lesser Evils: Ten Quartets, 1988
A Summer Life, 1990

Poetry and Fiction for Teens and Older Children

Baseball in April, and Other Stories, 1990
A Fire in My Hands, 1991
Taking Sides, 1991
Neighborhood Odes, 1992

Pacific Crossing, 1992
Local News, 1993
Crazy Weekend, 1994
Jesse, 1994
Canto Familiar/Familiar Song, 1995
Summer on Wheels, 1995
Buried Onions, 1997
Novio Boy, 1997
Petty Crimes, 1998

Fiction for Younger Children

The Cat's Meow, 1987
The Skirt, 1992
The Pool Party, 1993
Too Many Tamales, 1993
Boys at Work, 1995
Chato's Kitchen, 1995
The Old Man and His Door, 1995
Off and Running, 1996
Snapshots from the Wedding, 1996
Big Bushy Mustache, 1998

HONORS AND AWARDS

Academy of American Poets Prize: 1975
The Nation Award: 1975
United States Award (International Poetry Forum): 1976
Bess Hokin Prize (*Poetry* magazine): 1978
Guggenheim Fellowship: 1980
Creative Writing Fellowship (National Endowment for the Arts): 1981, 1990
Levinson Award (*Poetry* magazine): 1984
American Book Award (Before Columbus Foundation): 1985, for *Living Up the Street*
Beatty Award (California Library Association): 1990, for *Baseball in April*
Best Book for Young Adults (American Library Association): 1990, for *Baseball in April*
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Andrew Carnegie Medal for Video (American Library Association): 1993, for *The Pool Party*

FURTHER READING

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www.penguinputnam.com/catalog/yreader/authors/199_biography.html
www.mcdougallittell.com/lit/guest/garchive/soto.htm
www.bookpage.com/9805/gary_soto.html

Richard Wright 1908-1960

American Novelist and Short Story Writer
Author of *Native Son* and *Black Boy*

BIRTH

Richard Nathaniel Wright was born September 4, 1908, near Natchez, Mississippi. He was the son of Nathan Wright, an illiterate sharecropper, and Ella Wilson Wright, a country schoolteacher. He had one brother, Leon Alan.

YOUTH AND EDUCATION

Wright spent his first few years in one of Mississippi's many rural farming communities, playing along the shores of the

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mighty Mississippi River. "I was born too far back in the woods to hear the train whistle, and you could only hear the hoot owls holler," he once wrote. The family struggled financially, and in 1914 Wright's parents decided to move to Memphis, Tennessee. His father got a job as a night porter in a drugstore, but the rest of the family found it hard to adjust to the city. "In Memphis, we lived in a one-story brick tenement," Wright recalled. "The stone buildings and the concrete pavements looked bleak and hostile to me. The absence of green, growing things made the city seem dead. . . . In the front and rear were paved areas in which my brother and I could play, but for days I was afraid to go into the strange city streets alone."

As Wright grew older, he found that it was impossible to maintain any kind of relationship with his father, who mostly ignored his children. "He was the lawgiver in our family and I never laughed in his presence," Wright remembered. "He was always a stranger to me, always somehow alien and remote."

Poverty and Hunger

Wright's childhood was a difficult one in other ways, too. Even though Ella Wright took a job as a cook to supplement her husband's paycheck, the Wright family continued to struggle to put food on their table. "Hunger stole upon me so slowly that at first I was not aware of what hunger really meant," Wright later wrote. "Hunger had always been more or less at my elbow when I played, but now I began to wake up at night to find hunger standing at my bedside, staring at me gauntly. The hunger I had known before this had been no grim, hostile stranger; it had been a normal hunger that had made me beg constantly for bread, and when I ate a crust or two I was satisfied. But this new hunger baffled me, scared me, made me angry and insistent. . . . I became less active in my play, and for the first time in my life I had to pause and think of what was happening to me." The situation became even worse when his father abandoned the family to go live with another woman. "The image of my father became associated with the pangs of hunger," Wright remembered. "Whenever I felt hunger, I thought of him with a deep biological bitterness." His mother took a second job as a housemaid, but the family fell deeper into poverty.

Despite the family's poverty, Wright was an inquisitive child. "[I] made myself a nuisance by asking far too many questions of everybody," he said. "Every happening in the neighborhood, no matter how trivial, became my business." He also was very interested in learning to read, and his mother used newspapers to teach him.

But around 1915 Ella Wright's health began to fail. The long hours working two jobs, the pressure of raising two young boys alone, and depression over her grim economic circumstances all took their toll. She became unable to care for her sons, and they were placed in an orphanage. "The house was crowded with children and there was always a storm of noise," wrote Wright. "The daily routine was blurred to me and I never quite grasped it. The most abiding feeling I had each day was hunger and fear. . . . The children were silent, hostile, vindictive, continuously complaining of hunger."

Wright's mother eventually recovered her health somewhat, and she took her children back. But she continued to struggle to provide for herself and her children. Wright received little formal schooling during this period. As he grew older, however, he gained a dawning understanding that blacks in the American South did not have the same rights that white people enjoyed. At this time in American history, particularly in the South, there were laws that segregated people by race. For example, white people and "colored" people were required to use separate restrooms, drinking fountains, schools, theaters, and restaurants. Known as "Jim Crow" laws, these laws discriminated against blacks and placed them in an inferior position in society. Under "Jim Crow," acts of violence against black people were common. Basically, whites could treat blacks as badly as they wanted without any fear, since all the laws of the region said that black people were inferior and did not have the same rights as whites.

Living with his Grandparents

Around 1919, when Richard was about 11, Ella Wright suffered several strokes that left her crippled. She was forced to take her children to live in Arkansas with relatives. A year or so later, she and her sons moved in to her parents' home in Jackson, Mississippi. Wright's Aunt Addie lived in the house as well, making conditions very crowded. "We lived in the very heart of the local Black Belt," remembered Wright. "There were black churches and black preachers; there were black schools and black teachers; black groceries and black clerks. In fact, everything was so solidly black that for a long time I did not even think of white folks, save in remote or vague terms."

Richard Wright's grandparents were devoutly religious, and they immediately insisted that he and his brother follow all their strict rules. Wright's life became dominated by the teachings of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. "Half a dozen daily prayers were supplemented by all-night revival meetings," wrote Wright biographer Robert Bone. "Dietary restrictions further reduced an already meager food supply. Boyish recreations

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such as baseball and marbles were forbidden. Books on non-religious subjects were proscribed as 'the Devil's work.'"

Wright rebelled against these strict rules, and he soon became an outsider within his own family. At the same time, his mother's health continued to deteriorate. "My mother's suffering grew into a symbol in my mind," Wright later wrote. "A somberness of spirit that I was never to lose settled over me during the slow years of my mother's unrelieved suffering, a somberness that was to make me stand apart and look upon excessive joy with suspicion, that was to make me self-conscious, that was to make me keep forever on the move, as though to escape a nameless fate seeking to overtake me."

"Hunger had always been more or less at my elbow when I played, but now I began to wake up at night to find hunger standing at my bedside, staring at me gauntly. The hunger I had known before this had been no grim, hostile stranger; it had been a normal hunger that had made me beg constantly for bread, and when I ate a crust or two I was satisfied. But this new hunger baffled me, scared me, made me angry and insistent. . . . I became less active in my play, and for the first time in my life I had to pause and think of what was happening to me."

Soon after moving in with his grandparents, Wright was sent to Jim Hill public school. Even though his schooling had been very limited prior to this, he did so well that he was promoted to the sixth grade within two weeks. "I told the family emphatically that I was going to study medicine, engage in research, make discoveries," he remembered. In subsequent months he studied very hard, and he regained some of the curiosity that he had had about the world in his younger days. "I now saw a world leap to life before my eyes because I could explore it, and that meant not going home when school was out, but wandering, watching, asking, talking," Wright stated. He spent long hours exploring the Jackson area with his friends, venturing through the woods and rivers that lay on the town's outskirts and slipping in to neighborhood ball fields, pool rooms, and lumber yards to watch men work and play. He also made his first attempts at writing, and in 1924 he wrote a story called "The Voodoo of Hell's Half-Acre" that was published in a

local black newspaper. But instead of congratulating him, his family rebuked him for wasting his time on such ungodly pursuits.

As Wright grew older, he found the atmosphere in his grandparents' home to be almost unbearably stifling. He disliked the many rules that governed the household, but he became even angrier about the attitudes that his family expressed when he told them about his dreams for the future or expressed anger about how black people were mistreated. His family told him that it was ridiculous for him to dream about a better life for himself, and they urged him to accept the status of black people in southern society. They warned him that white people often beat up, jailed, or lynched black people who rebelled against their station in life.

"The impulse to dream had been slowly beaten out of me by experience," he wrote. "Now it surged up again and I hungered for books, new ways of looking and seeing."

Wright refused to accept this state of affairs. "The white South said that I had a 'place' in life," he later wrote. "Well, I had never felt my 'place'; or rather, my deepest instincts had always made me reject the 'place' to which the white South had assigned me. It had never occurred to me that I was in any way an inferior being. And no word that I had ever heard fall from the lips of southern white men had ever made me really doubt the worth of my humanity." Shortly after graduating from ninth grade at age 17, he fled to Memphis, Tennessee. He hoped to eventually make his way to the northern United States, where he had heard that racism was not as bad as it was in the South. Once in Memphis, he supported himself with odd jobs and spent nearly all of his free time reading various books that his grandmother had forbidden. "The impulse to dream had been slowly beaten out of me by experience," he wrote. "Now it surged up again and I hungered for books, new ways of looking and seeing."

But life in Memphis was difficult, too. Wright was the victim of ugly incidents of racism, and he found that he had to use deception even to take books out of the library. "It was almost impossible to get a book to read," he recalled. "It was assumed that after a Negro had imbibed what scanty schooling the state furnished he had no further need for books." At one point he asked a white co-worker if he could use his name at the library, and to his relief the white man agreed. "Armed with a library card, I obtained books in the following manner: I would write a note to the librarian, saying: 'Please let this nigger boy have the following books.' I would

then sign it with the white man's name. . . . No doubt if any of the white patrons had suspected that some of the volumes they enjoyed had been in the home of a Negro, they would not have tolerated it for an instant."

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

By November 1927 Wright had saved up enough money to move to Chicago, Illinois. By this time he was sure that he wanted to be a writer. He spent his days working at a variety of jobs, including dishwasher, porter, busboy, and street sweeper. Wright's nights, meanwhile, usually consisted of long hours of writing.

Soon after his arrival in Chicago, his mother, brother, and aunt came to live with him. Wright took a job as a postal clerk to help support them. Soon after starting work there, he became friends with a group of employees that were members of the Communist Party. He started attending party meetings, and although he eventually distanced himself from Communist beliefs, he found this period of his life to be a rewarding one. Many of his new friends were bright and intellectually curious. Unlike his family, they encouraged him to develop his writing skills.

Wright eventually became one of the millions of Americans who lost their jobs during the Great Depression, a period of severe economic difficulty throughout the United States. The Great Depression, which started in 1929 and continued for years, severely damaged the economies of countries in the United States, Europe, and around the globe. Many businesses failed, many people lost their jobs, and poverty became a major problem. Lots of families had trouble finding food, shelter, and clothing, and even people who kept their jobs worried about the future.

In an essay entitled "How 'Bigger' Was Born," Wright said this: "He is a product of a dislocated society; he is a dispossessed and disinherited man; he is all of this, and he lives amid the greatest possible plenty on earth and he is looking and feeling for a way out. . . . He was an American, because he was also a native son; but he was also a Negro nationalist in a vague sense because he was not allowed to live as an American. Such was his way of life and mine; neither Bigger nor I resided fully in either camp.""

In 1935, however, Wright secured employment as a writer of guidebooks for the Federal Writer's Project, a relief program for unemployed writers. In 1937 Wright moved to New York, where he published several poems in small magazines and became a regular contributor to Communist newspapers. He also continued to work on his fiction writing. In 1938 he published four long stories in a volume entitled *Uncle Tom's Children.*

Uncle Tom's Children

The stories in *Uncle Tom's Children* featured mostly black characters and drew heavily on Wright's southern background. The title is derived from a famous abolitionist novel of the Civil War era, *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Stowe's novel is known for its stereotypical characters, such as the kindly old black slave, Uncle Tom. Wright's characters are vividly and realistically created as victims of an appalling racist culture. The stories detail the viciousness of racism, and the anger and violence that erupt between blacks and whites in its wake. Wright's powerful tales of racial injustice drew the attention of a number of reviewers, and led First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to recommend him for a Guggenheim Fellowship, an honor he received in 1939.

Yet Wright was unhappy with the response to *Uncle Tom's Children*. He later wrote that after it was published, "I realized that I had made an awfully naive mistake. I found that I had written a book which even bankers' daughters could read and weep over and feel good about. I swore to myself that if I ever wrote another book, no one would weep over it; that it would be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolation of tears. It was this that made me get to work in dead earnest."

Native Son

Wright returned to writing, but this time he was determined to pour all of his anger about black-white relations out onto the page. The final result was the 1940 book *Native Son*, which has become a classic of American literature. It tells the story of Bigger Thomas, an alienated black youth from the slums of Chicago who accidentally murders the daughter of a wealthy white family and his own girlfriend before being caught and sentenced to death. As Marjorie R. Smelstor wrote in *USA Today* in 1990: "This synopsis could be a front-page story in a major metropolitan newspaper, which in fact was the genesis of the novel." Wright based the character in part on a case involving a young black man named Robert Nixon, who had confessed to murdering and raping several young women.

The origin of Bigger, Wright's most famous and fully realized character, provides insights into the author as well. In an essay entitled "How 'Bigger' Was Born," Wright said this: "He is a product of a dislocated society'; he is a dispossessed and disinherited man; he is all of this, and he lives amid the greatest possible plenty on earth and he is looking and feeling for a way out. . . . He was an American, because he was also a native son; but he was also a Negro nationalist in a vague sense because he was not allowed to live as an American. Such was his way of life and mine; neither Bigger nor I resided fully in either camp."

Native Son quickly became one of the most controversial books ever to be published in the United States. Critics were astonished at Wright's unflinching portrayal of black rage and its roots in social injustice. Indeed, the book completely destroyed the white myth of the good-natured, subservient black man, replacing it with a disconcerting figure of violence. Some reviewers bitterly criticized the novel, finding its setting, themes, and violence repugnant. One of the most prominent black authors of the era, James Baldwin, accused Wright of creating stereotypes and making Bigger little more than a "monster." Another major black writer, Ralph Ellison, said, "While I rejected Bigger Thomas as any *final* image of Negro

personality, I recognized *Native Son* as an achievement; as one man's essay in defining the human condition as seen from a specific Negro perspective at a given time in a given place."

For others, *Native Son* was like no other book of its era. "American culture was changed forever," claimed critic Irving Howe. "Mr. Wright has laid bare, with a ruthlessness that spares neither race, the lower depths of the human and social relationship of blacks and whites," wrote *Nation* reviewer Margaret Marshall. "His ruthlessness . . . clearly springs not from a vindictive desire to shock but from a passionate—and compassionate—concern with a problem obviously lying at the core of his own personal reality."

Wright's novel was selected by the Book of the Month Club as one of its main selections, its first selection by a black author. It sold more than 250,000 copies in just six months. Around the same time, Orson Welles staged a theatrical version of the novel starring Canada Lee as Bigger Thomas, and it was a huge hit. Feature stories on Wright and furious debates about the merits of *Native Son* appeared in newspapers in America and around the world. And most importantly to Wright, people began examining more closely the impoverished and degrading circumstances in which black Americans were often forced to live.

Black Boy

After publishing a nonfiction book called *Twelve Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro of the United States* in 1943, Wright turned his full attention to writing an autobiography. In 1945 his book *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* was released. This book proved to be tremendously popular. Another Book of the Month selection, it sold half a million copies in its first year. Within the pages of *Black Boy,* Wright pours out a searing account of his childhood in the American South, where poverty, fear, and hatred stalked all black neighborhoods. And while he bitterly condemns

whites for their racist attitudes, he also shines a spotlight on a black culture that, because of its legacy of powerlessness and fear of white society, sometimes opposed individual blacks who wanted a better life for themselves.

In the spring of 1946, Wright decided to visit Paris, France, after receiving a formal invitation from the French government. During his six-month stay, he fell in love with the city and became acquainted with many of the nation's leading writers. Even more importantly, however, he felt that the racism that was so prevalent in the United States was less pervasive in France. Wright briefly returned to New York in January 1947, but within months he decided that he preferred France. He moved to Paris later that summer, where he settled in a spacious apartment. In 1956 he bought a country house in Normandy, France.

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> ***"I had accidentally blundered into the secret black, hidden core of race relations in the United States. That core is this: nobody is ever expected to speak honestly about the problem."***
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Life in France

Wright spent the last 13 years of his life living in France, where he became one of its best-known personalities. He became a popular lecturer on literature and social issues, and he often appeared on French television and radio programs. He also entertained travelers from around the world, striking up friendships with leading black Americans, French intellectuals, and African diplomats who visited his home.

Wright spent a good deal of his time during the 1950s visiting various African nations and writing about their histories and cultures. He became a leading proponent of national independence movements throughout that continent, and in books like *Black Power* (1954) and *The Color Curtain* (1956) Wright offered his opinions on a wide range of political issues that impacted the lives of blacks in Africa and elsewhere.

Wright also continued writing fiction, although scholars agree that his later works lack the power of *Native Son* and *Black Boy*. In 1953 he published *The Outsider*, a novel about a black man who becomes a Communist, with violent consequences. A year later he published *Savage Holiday*, and in 1958 his last novel, called *The Long Dream*, was published. Wright continued to work on literary projects until his death from a heart

attack on November 28, 1960, in Paris. A collection of short stories called *Eight Men* and a novel called *Lawd Today* were published posthumously.

Years after Wright's death, scholars discovered that sections of both *Native Son* and *Black Boy* that Wright had originally intended to publish as part of those books had been deleted at the urging of the Book of the Month Club (BOMC). The original version of *Native Son* had included a masturbation scene that more clearly showed Bigger Thomas's sexual desires. Scholars believe, however, that since masturbation was a taboo subject in publishing in 1940, the BOMC refused to sell the book unless Wright took the scene out. Desperate to see his book included in the BOMC, Wright reluctantly agreed to the change. Today, some reviewers claim that the scene gives greater insights into the character of Bigger, and that it was very unfortunate that the scene was not included in the 1940 novel. *Black Boy,* meanwhile, had originally included a large section that dealt with Wright's years in Chicago; in 1977 this section was finally published as *American Hunger.* In 1991, the complete versions of both *Native Son* and *Black Boy* were finally published in *Richard Wright: Works,* a two-volume set containing all of the author's major writings.

WRIGHT'S LEGACY

Wright continues to hold a distinguished place in American literature for his major works, *Native Son* and *Black Boy,* which remain disturbingly relevant to modern life. As Wright himself witnessed after his first literary success, "I had accidentally blundered into the secret black, hidden core of race relations in the United States. That core is this: nobody is ever expected to speak honestly about the problem." That is what Wright tried to do, and it is for the powerful, painful truth of his work that he is still read and revered. As Marjorie Smelstor wrote of *Native Son*: "More unnerving and unsettling than this novel is the realization that, 50 years after the publication of Wright's book, America still is giving birth to native sons whose lives are characterized by fear, flight, and fate. Richard Wright's *Native Son* and our native sons are with us, and we need the former to help us understand and affect the lives of the latter."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

In August 1939 Wright married Dhimah Rose Meadman, a dancer. Their marriage ended in divorce less than three years later, however. On March 12, 1941, Wright married Ellen Poplar, with whom he had two daughters, Julia and Rachel.

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Laurence Yep 1948-

American Novelist for Young Adults and Children
Best-Selling Author of *Dragonwings* and *Dragon's Gate*

BIRTH

Laurence Michael Yep was born on June 14, 1948, in San Francisco, California, to Thomas Gim and Franche Lee Yep, a couple of Chinese descent who owned and operated a local grocery store. Laurence had one brother, Thomas, who was nine years older. Thomas, who was nicknamed Spike, was actually the one who named his younger brother when he was born. "In order to make him feel part of what was happening,

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my parents let him name me and he chose Laurence," explains Yep. "It was only years later that I found out the reason why. He named me after a saint he had been studying in school—a saint that had died a particularly gruesome death."

YOUTH

Yep's childhood was a rough one in some respects. His family lived in a modest apartment above his parents' grocery store, and the neighborhood in which they lived suffered from a high number of burglaries and other crimes. "My bedroom was right above the burglar alarm [in the store]," recalls Yep. "Sometimes the alarm would go off. That meant someone was trying to get in. . . . To this day, I can't hear an alarm clock without feeling my stomach tensing and experiencing all the other reactions I used to go through with the burglar alarm."

> ***"As a child Yep often felt inadequate, especially when he compared himself to his older brother. "He was always the impossible standard by which I tried to measure myself—in sports, in academics, and even in friendship. Spike always seemed to know the right thing to say and do, so that I was always feeling clumsy and inept."***

When Yep was growing up, he lived in a primarily black neighborhood. He felt isolated and alienated, like he was not really accepted by other children. He often visited a nearby area of San Francisco known as Chinatown in which many Chinese people lived. But he couldn't speak the Chinese language, which made him feel like an outsider there, also. "I was the Chinese American raised in a black neighborhood, a child who had been too American to fit into Chinatown and too Chinese to fit in elsewhere," remembers Yep. "As a Chinese child growing up in a black neighborhood, I served as the all-purpose Asian. When we played war, I was the Japanese who got killed; then when the Korean War came along, I was a North Korean communist. This sense of being the odd one out is probably what made me relate to the [Chronicles of] Narnia and the [Wizard of] Oz books. They were about loneliness and kids in alien societies learning to adjust to foreign cultures. I could understand these a lot better than the stories in our readers where every house had a front lawn and no one's front door was ever locked."

Sports and games were other areas where Yep felt like an outsider. He often felt inadequate, especially when he compared himself to his older brother. "He was always the impossible standard by which I tried to measure myself—in sports, in academics, and even in friendship. Spike always seemed to know the right thing to say and do, so that I was always feeling clumsy and inept. Comparing myself to my athletic father, mother, and brother, I often felt like a changeling, wondering how I wound up being born into the family. I felt not only inadequate but incomplete—like a puzzle with several key pieces missing."

"I'm ashamed to say that when I was a child, I didn't want to be Chinese. It took me years to realize that I was Chinese whether I wanted to be or not. And it was something I had to learn to accept: to know its strengths and weaknesses. It's something that is a part of me from the deepest level of my soul to my most every day actions."

Both of his parents had been superb athletes, and they encouraged their youngest son to develop his athletic skills. But for Yep, all of his efforts seemed like a waste of time. "Despite all the practice and coaching from my father, I was hopeless when it came to catching any ball in any shape or size," he says. "Nor could I dribble a basketball, even though my father sometimes kept me practicing in the little courtyard until it was almost too dark to see." Yep had a bit more success with football. As he grew older and stronger, he became adept at blocking and rushing, but he still dreaded being asked to handle the ball. "I still remember one game where I dropped three touchdown passes in a row," he says. "I was so bad that our opponents stopped covering me. Our quarterback, unable to resist a wide-open target, persisted in throwing to me—and I dropped yet a fourth pass that could have been a touchdown." Such incidents, he later admitted, destroyed his self-confidence.

Family Life

Despite the difficulties of his early childhood, Yep has many happy family memories. His parents worked very hard at the grocery store to provide for their two sons. "[Whenever] I started to resent my chores I had my parents' example to make me feel ashamed," he recalls. "My parents merely worked a twelve-hour day, seven days a week, opening for only a

half day on Christmas. Later, my father began taking Christmas Day itself off; and eventually even took Sundays off." But his parents made sure that they spent time with young Laurence even though they were busy at the store. His mother would sometimes slip away from the store and take him on excursions around the city to ice rinks, museums, amusement parks, and miniature golf courses. His father, meanwhile, tried to help him in his sports activities and often took him kite flying around San Francisco. "My father was the master of the winds," remembers Yep. "With his feet planted firmly in the grass and with just a puff of a breeze, he could coax a kite up high into the sky."

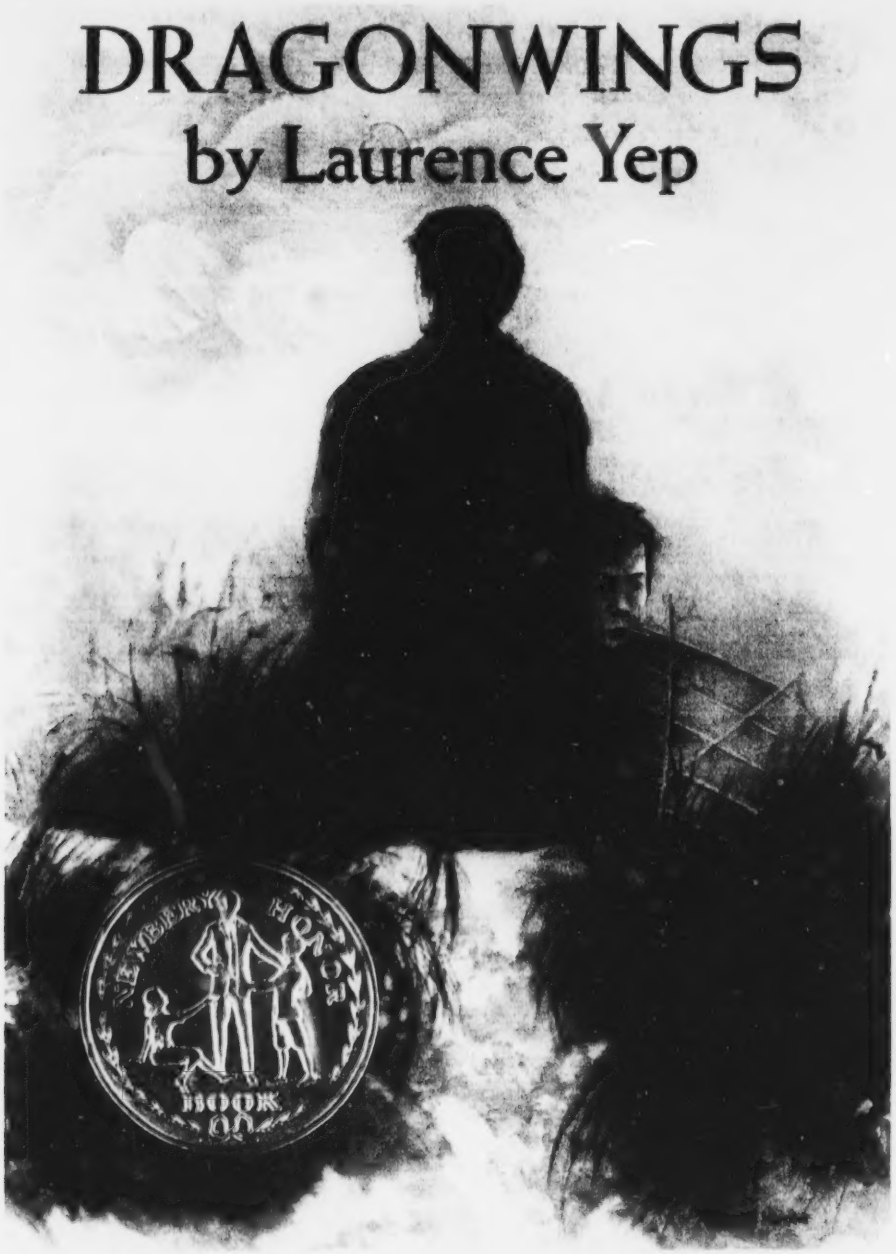
Yep was also very close to his maternal grandmother, who lived in Chinatown. A lively, independent woman, she doted on her grandsons and tried to interest them in the country of their ancestors. Despite her efforts, though, Laurence struggled to come to terms with his Chinese heritage. "I'm ashamed to say that when I was a child, I didn't want to be Chinese. It took me years to realize that I was Chinese whether I wanted to be or not. And it was something I had to learn to accept: to know its strengths and weaknesses. It's something that is a part of me from the deepest level of my soul to my most every day actions."

Yep resisted his grandmother's efforts to interest him in Chinese history, but he still enjoyed her company. "In the 1960s," he recalls, "there was one radio station that broadcast an hour of Chinese music and news each evening. My grandmother was afraid that if she ever changed the dial, she would not be able to find that station again, so she left her radio tuned to it all the time. However, during the daytime, the station broadcast rock and roll." As a result, his grandmother became a Beatles fan even before her youngest grandson did.

While Yep enjoyed the loving support of his family, he also found great comfort in reading. Even as a youngster, he was a regular visitor to the main branch of the San Francisco public library, and he often made selections from the fantasy and science fiction sections. "Ironically, what seemed 'truer' to me were science fiction and fantasy [stories]," says Yep, "because in those books children were taken to other lands and other worlds where they had to learn strange customs and languages—and that was something I did every time I got on and off the bus."

EDUCATION

As a youngster, Yep commuted to Chinatown to attend St. Mary's Grammar School, a Catholic school taught by nuns. He was a very good student, but his inability to understand the Chinese language often bothered



him. "My lack of Chinese made me an outsider in Chinatown—sometimes even among my friends," says Yep. "Since it was a Catholic school taught by nuns, my friends would always tell dirty jokes in Chinese so the nuns wouldn't understand. However, neither did I, so I missed out on a good deal of humor when I was a boy. What Chinese I did pick up was

the Chinese that got spoken in the playground—mostly insults and vulgar names."

After completing his elementary school education, Yep enrolled in San Francisco's St. Ignatius High School, where most of his classmates were white. But while his Chinese background continued to make him feel like an outsider on some occasions, high school was a positive experience for Yep in most ways. "My class was a group of funny, creative boys; and we had teachers to match," he said.

At first, Yep's favorite courses were chemistry and other subjects in the sciences, but by the time he graduated from St. Ignatius in 1966, English had become his favorite subject. He particularly enjoyed writing essays and short stories. "When I wrote," he remembers, "I went from being a puzzle to a puzzle solver. I could reach into the box of rags that was my soul and begin stitching them together. . . . I could takes these different elements, each of which belonged to someone else, and dip them into my imagination where they were melted down and cast into new shapes so that they became uniquely mine."

Yep's inability to understand the Chinese language often bothered him. "My lack of Chinese made me an outsider in Chinatown—sometimes even among my friends. Since it was a Catholic school taught by nuns, my friends would always tell dirty jokes in Chinese so the nuns wouldn't understand. However, neither did I, so I missed out on a good deal of humor when I was a boy. What Chinese I did pick up was the Chinese that got spoken in the playground—mostly insults and vulgar names."

Moving On to College

In the fall of 1966, Yep left home for Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to study journalism. The expense of sending Laurence to college was significant for his parents—he later learned that his father even gave up drinking soda pop in order to put the savings towards his son's education—but they were determined to help him earn a college degree.

A few months after arriving at Marquette, Yep became friends with a number of classmates. He became especially close to a fellow writer

named Joanne Ryder, who would eventually become his wife. But he struggled in some of his journalism classes, and the harsh Midwestern winters contributed to a severe case of homesickness that his grandmother's packages of cookies could not cure. In 1968 he transferred to the University of California at Santa Cruz, where he earned a bachelor's degree in 1970, and five years later he earned a Ph.D. from State University of New York at Buffalo.

"In school, Yep particularly enjoyed writing essays and short stories. "When I wrote, I went from being a puzzle to a puzzle solver. I could reach into the box of rags that was my soul and begin stitching them together. . . . I could takes these different elements, each of which belonged to someone else, and dip them into my imagination where they were melted down and cast into new shapes so that they became uniquely mine."

BECOMING A WRITER

Yep's first success as a writer occurred during his freshman year at Marquette University, when a challenge from one of his writing professors spurred him to write a science fiction story called "The Selchey Kids." He subsequently submitted the story to a science fiction magazine, and several weeks later an editor from the magazine contacted him, offering him a penny a word for the rights to publish the story. Yep excitedly accepted the offer. When the story was later selected for inclusion in a book called *The World's Best Science Fiction of 1969,* he knew that he wanted to try to make a living as a writer.

During the next several years Yep wrote a number of science fiction stories for adults, even though he also maintained a busy school schedule. But he was unable to duplicate the success he had enjoyed with "The Selchey Kids" until Joanne Ryder suggested that he write a science fiction story for a younger audience. The result was his first young adult novel, *Sweetwater* (1973).

In *Sweetwater,* Yep tells a futuristic story about a young man named Tyree and his efforts to help his outnumbered people survive on the planet Harmony, which is dominated by two other alien cultures. Tyree is part of a minority group called Silkies, who are descendants of space travelers whose ships crashed on Harmony long before. Yep addressed a variety of issues in the story, including freedom and tolerance, the rights of the mi-

nority, the interdependence of all living things, and the ways in which prejudice and misunderstandings can hurt members of different cultural groups. Reviewers praised the novel as an imaginative, emotionally rich, and beautifully written science fiction work.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

The publication of *Sweetwater* in 1973 marked the beginning of a prolific and varied writing career for Laurence Yep. Since then, he has published about 40 works for young readers of all ages, from the youngest children through the teen audience. His works span a wide array of genres as well, including historical fiction, realistic contemporary fiction, folk tales, and science fiction and fantasy.

Despite the wide variety of genres and age levels, these works share many elements in common. Many of the stories explore the theme of the outsider in society and showcase San Francisco's Chinatown, two topics from his own childhood. Throughout most of his work, Yep incorporates elements that are crucial to the Chinese-American experience, including ancient Chinese folklore and fairy tales, stories and people from Chinese history, the culture clash between traditional Chinese values and American society, and observations on what it means to be of Chinese heritage in America. As he explained in his autobiography, *The Lost Garden* (1991), many of his books represent his search for cultural identity: "[My] Chinese-American books are a way of stepping into the shoes of members of my family."

Dragonwings

Yep first came to widespread attention in 1975 with the publication of his second novel for young adults, *Dragonwings*. This historical novel tells the story of an eight-year-old Chinese boy named Moon Shadow who sails to San Francisco in the first years of the 20th century. Moon Shadow is going to live with his father, a kite maker named Windrider who dreams of building his own airplane. Yep's own father, who was also a kite maker, was the model for Windrider. The novel combines a gripping account of the efforts of Moon Shadow and Windrider to build a life for themselves in a strange country with a fascinating exploration of Chinese-American history. In fact, Yep was inspired to write the book after trying to do research into the history of early Chinese immigrants in America. He found very little information about the people as individuals, but he did read about the exploits of a forgotten figure from that era named Fung Joe Guey. A daring Chinese-American aviator of the early 1900s, Fung Joe

Guey flew his own flying machine over Oakland, California, just a few years after the Wright brothers made history's first recorded airplane flight.

Within weeks of its publication, *Dragonwings* was hailed as one of the finest young adult novels of the year. Praised for its vivid characters, Chinese folk-

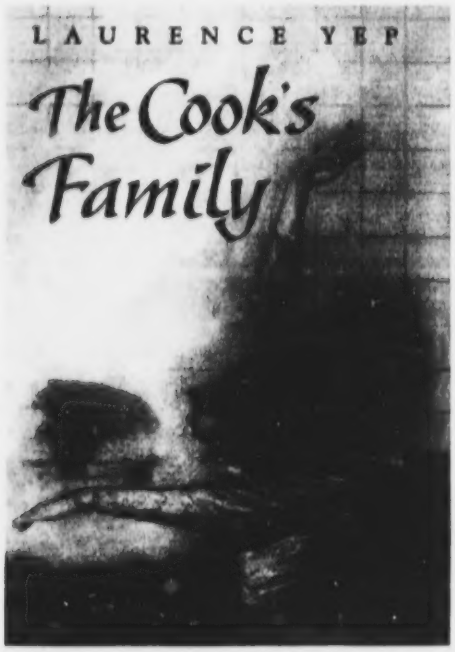
lore, original plot, sensitive handling of discrimination, and unique perspective, the book was called "an exquisitely written poem of praise to the courage and industry of the Chinese-American people" by critic Ruth H. Pelmas of the *New York Times Book Review*. Within a few months of its publication it had received a number of major awards, including the prestigious Newbery Honor Award. *Dragonwings* established Yep as one of America's finest writers of young adult fiction and reassured him that he could make a living as a novelist. Even more importantly, as Yep has said, by writing *Dragonwings* "I finally confronted my own Chinese-American identity."

Historical Fiction about Chinese-Americans

Dragonwings was the first of several works of realistic fiction that dealt with Chinese and Chinese-American history. His next work of this type was *The Serpent's Children* (1984), an account of peasant life in China in the first half of the 19th century. The story focuses on young Cassia and her brother Foxfire, after their father goes off to fight against the white invaders who have brought opium into their country. Their mother dies, their father comes home injured, and young Foxfire wants to leave China and join the gold rush in California. It's a story about inter-generational conflicts and the discord between the father, who dreams of revolution; Cassia, who dreams of family unity; and Foxfire, who dreams of financial prosperity.

After *The Serpent's Children*, Yep wrote two companion books, *Mountain Light* (1985) and *Dragon's Gate* (1993), which continue to explore this time period through interrelated characters. In *Mountain Light*, we meet Cassia, her father, and Squeaky, who have been fighting together against the Manchus, despotic rulers of China. The story recounts their difficult voyage home after the war and Squeaky's decision to move to the United States. *Dragon's Gate* tells the story of Otter, a young boy in China who is sent to America after he kills a Manchu. Otter, who is Foxfire's nephew, joins up with his uncle on a work crew cutting through the mountains to build the transcontinental railroad. The story shows the endurance of the Chinese immigrant workers in the face of brutal and inhuman conditions—including cold, starvation, exhaustion, and maiming—while building the railroad. Yep earned his second Newbery Honor Award for *Dragon's Gate*.

Yep has written several other works of historical fiction. One is *The Star Fisher* (1991), a story set in 1927 that features a Chinese family's efforts to make a home in West Virginia, while suffering prejudice and discrimination. The novel is based on the experiences of his mother's family, who



lived in West Virginia before moving to California. Another is *Hiroshima* (1995), a fictionalized account of people's experiences in Hiroshima, Japan, when the United States dropped an atomic bomb there at the close of World War II. Yep tells the dramatic facts with controlled intensity, and the result is a devastating account of total horror.

Realistic Contemporary Fiction

In addition to realistic historical fiction, Yep has also written realistic fiction in a contemporary setting, telling stories about the lives of Chinese-Americans living in the modern world. In *Child of the Owl* (1977), Casey is a young Chinese-American girl in the 1960s who has lived a very Western existence—until she is sent to live with her grandmother in Chinatown, where she learns about her Chinese background. The follow up to that book was *Thief of Hearts* (1995), in which Stacy, the daughter of Casey from the earlier book, works to understand her Chinese-American heritage. Stacy feels very distant from her Chinese past until she meets Hong Ch'un, a new immigrant from China, and begins to delve into her family's history. Another realistic work focusing on similar themes was *Sea Glass* (1979), an autobiographical novel about a Chinese-American boy whose family moves from Chinatown in San Francisco to a small town, where he struggles with rejection from both white and Chinese cultural groups.

Yep moved his focus away from Chinese-American themes in several of his next books. *Kind Hearts and Gentle Monsters* (1982) depicts the friendship between two teenagers who start out as adversaries, get to know each other, develop sympathy for the difficulties each one faces (including a mentally unstable mother), and eventually become close. *Liar, Liar* (1983) is a mystery story about Sean, who sets out to prove that the death of his best friend, a practical joker named Marsh, wasn't an accident.

Yep returned to familiar issues in *Ribbons* (1996), about Robin, a young talented dancer whose family can no longer afford to pay for ballet lessons when they help her Chinese grandmother immigrate to the U.S.

Family disharmony, jealousy, and conflict over heritage are explored here. Their story was followed up in *The Cook's Family* (1998), in which Robin befriends a lonely cook in Chinatown and discovers a sense of her own Chinese heritage in the process. Yep's most recent works of realistic fiction are the Chinatown Mystery Series, with two volumes published to date: *The Case of the Goblin's Pearls* (1997) and *The Case of the Lion Dance* (1998). These stories, set in the Chinese-American community in San Francisco, feature the exploits of 12-year-old Lily Lew and her Auntie Tiger Lil, a former Hollywood movie star who still believes she is an action-adventure heroine. Part comedy, part detective story, and part factual information about the Chinese-American community, these fun and funny novels are sure to please Yep's many fans.

Folk Tales and Fantasy Stories

In addition to his works of realistic fiction, Yep has also written many books of folklore and fantasy based on traditional Chinese folk tales and Chinese mythology. Two of these, *Rainbow People* (1989) and *Tongues of Jade* (1991), are retellings of stories that were first told by Chinese immigrants who lived in America during the 1920s and 1930s. "These folktales were strategies for living," Yep writes. "They provided the recipes for health and wealth. More importantly, they told how to turn defeat into victory, sadness into peace. When I tried to retell those stories, I tried to be like a Chinese ghost. In Chinese ghost stories, the spirits slip in and out of bodies as if they are in Grand Central Station. I tried to do something similar with a folktale—trying to slip into it to see if I could make it breathe and move. When the process worked, the characters came to life, becoming people I knew in Chinatown."

> *As Yep explained in his autobiography,* **The Lost Garden,** *many of his books represent his search for cultural identity: "[My] Chinese American books are a way of stepping into the shoes of members of my family."*

Other folk tales by Yep include *The Ghost Fox* (1994), a retelling of a traditional story about a nine-year-old boy who saves his mother from a ghost fox who is stealing his mother's soul; *Tree of Dreams: Ten Tales from the Garden of Night* (1995), a collection of stories from around the world that ponder the nature of dreams; and *The Imp that Ate My Homework* (1998), which takes a malevolent four-armed, furry green imp from ancient

Chinese folklore and plunks him down in modern times to torment a young boy, as a way of getting revenge against the boy's grandfather.

In addition to these works for older children, Yep has recently published several folk tales for younger readers as well. These beautifully illustrated retellings of traditional Chinese folk tales include *The Shell Woman and the King* (1993), about a man who brags about marrying the beautiful and magical Shell and earns the anger of the cruel king, who makes Shell complete several seemingly impossible tasks to win her freedom; *The Man Who Tricked a Ghost* (1993), an exuberant story about brave Sung, who is clever and imaginative enough to trick the ghost who is trying to scare him; *Tiger Woman* (1994), a spirited story about a selfish old woman who refuses to share her food with a beggar, who casts a spell that turns the old woman into a series of animals; *The City of Dragons* (1995), about the saddest looking boy in the world, who leaves home to spare people the pain of looking at him and is then rewarded for his selflessness; and *The Dragon Prince: A Chinese Beauty and the Beast Tale* (1997), an elegantly crafted story in which Seven, the youngest daughter of a poor farmer, agrees to marry a dragon to save her father's life—only to discover, later, that the dragon is something other than he seems.

"Here, Yep explains why he enjoys writing for children. "Adult history thunders on a grand scale like a movie in cinemascope. But for all of its size, it is still flat, and its actors are like ants except for a few close-ups of the stars. But a child's history is like a hologram that can be held in the palm, quiet and small but three-dimensional. It treats its subjects with an immediateness that makes them seem to live and breathe."

The Dragon Series

Some of Yep's best known works are the fantasy books in the Dragon Series, including *Dragon of the Lost Sea* (1982), *Dragon Steel* (1985), *Dragon Cauldron* (1991), and *Dragon War* (1992).

Based on Chinese dragon myths, these adventure books tell the story of the dragon Shimmer and the boy Thorn. Shimmer is a dragon princess with magical powers who has been exiled from her kingdom. She and Thorn, later joined by Monkey and Indigo, are battling the evil forces that

have stolen the dragons' underwater kingdom. Throughout their quest, they undergo fearsome and exciting adventures filled with dungeons, sea monsters, and magicians, all taken from ancient Chinese legend and mythology. In addition to the fast-paced excitement and dramatic tension, these stories are enlivened with humor and witty dialogue that bring the characters to life.

Future Plans

Yep has been working as writer-in-residence at the University of California, Santa Barbara, since 1990, but he continues to write prolifically as well. He has many plans for future writings, which he shares here. "After 20 years of research, I've come to think of Chinese America as a Chinese scroll painting. It's a landscape that keeps unrolling, and I keep seeing some of the landmarks and people as they emerge. I plan to expand the Young family saga that was begun in *Serpent's Children* and continued in *Mountain Light* and *Dragon's Gate*. The new books will be about the next few generations up to World War II. I'm also following *The Case of the Goblin Pearls* with more stories about Auntie Tiger Lil and contemporary Chinatown. And I'd like to explore the magic of Chinatown in more chapter books. Also, I have a filing cabinet full of folklore, and I've been thinking about teaming up with an artist to create picture books out a lot of these stories. And every now and then, the Monkey King and his dragon friends [from the Dragon Series] tug at my sleeve and tell me not to forget them either."

ADVICE FOR YOUNG WRITERS

Yep encourages young people to explore their writing abilities, but he also cautions them to do it for the right reasons. "If someone tells me they want to write, I say, 'Write for yourself, not for fame and fortune,'" writes Yep. "As a motive, fame and fortune usually leads to disappointment for a writer. But I'd be writing for myself, even if I were still bagging groceries back at the [family] store."

Yep also tells young writers that discipline is an important factor in being a successful author. "I try to write from four to six hours a day plus two more hours of note-taking and reading," he notes. "Of course, like anyone else, I'm tempted to go outside and enjoy San Francisco when it is sunny outside; and unlike most people I have no boss to keep me at work—or rather I have the hardest of bosses—myself; and so there is a voice inside me still that makes me stay at the computer."

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Yep married Joanne Ryder, a fellow writer whom he first met in the mid-1980s during his studies at Marquette. "My relationship with Joanne was very similar to the situation in the movie, *When Harry Met Sally,*" he recalls. "We began as friends and fell in love. Over the years as my wife, she has continued to be my best friend, adviser, and inspirer." They live in Pacific Grove, California.

HOBBIES AND OTHER INTERESTS

Yep remains an avid reader who especially enjoys reading about other cultures and countries. He also enjoys the theater, and has adapted some works from his Chinese folktale collections into one-act plays.

SELECTED WRITINGS

Writings for Older Children and Teens

Sweetwater, 1973
Dragonwings, 1975
Child of the Owl, 1977
Sea Glass, 1979
Kind Hearts and Gentle Monsters, 1982
The Mark Twain Murders, 1982
Liar, Liar, 1983
The Serpent's Children, 1984
The Tom Sawyer Fires, 1984
Mountain Light, 1985
Shadow Lord, 1985
Age of Wonders, 1987 (play)
The Rainbow People, 1989
The Star Fisher, 1991
Tongues of Jade, 1991

The Lost Garden, 1991 (autobiography)
Dragon's Gate, 1993
The Ghost Fox, 1994
Hiroshima: A Novella, 1995
Later, Gator, 1995
Thief of Hearts, 1995
Tree of Dreams: Ten Tales from the Garden of Night, 1995
Ribbons, 1996
The Case of the Goblin Pearls, 1997
The Case of the Lion Dance, 1998
The Cook's Family, 1998
The Imp that Ate My Homework, 1998

Dragon Series

Dragon of the Lost Sea, 1982
Dragon Steel, 1985
Dragon Cauldron, 1991
Dragon War, 1992

Writings for Younger Children

The Curse of the Squirrel, 1987
When the Bomb Dropped: The Story of Hiroshima, 1990
The Butterfly Boy, 1993
The Shell Woman and the King, 1993
The Man Who Tricked a Ghost, 1993
The Boy Who Swallowed Snakes, 1994
Tiger Woman, 1994
The Junior Thunder Lord, 1994
The City of Dragons, 1995
The Khan's Daughter, 1997
The Dragon Prince: A Chinese Beauty and the Beast Tale, 1997

Writings for Adults

Seademons, 1977
Monster Makers, Inc., 1986
Pay the Chinaman, 1987
Fairy Bones, 1987
American Dragons: A Collection of Asian American Voices, 1993 (editor)

HONORS AND AWARDS

Outstanding Books of the Year (*New York Times*): 1975, for *Dragonwings;* 1977, for *Child of the Owl*
Children's Book Award (International Reading Association): 1976, for *Dragonwings*
Carter G. Woodson Book Award (National Council for Social Studies): 1976, for *Dragonwings*
Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for Fiction: 1977, for *Child of the Owl*
Notable Children's Book (American Library Association): 1977, for *Child of the Owl;* 1982, for *Dragon of the Lost Sea*
Jane Addams Peace Award: 1978, for *Child of the Owl*
Lewis Carroll Shelf Award (University of Wisconsin): 1979, for *Dragonwings*
Friends of Children and Literature Award: 1984
Literature Fellowship (National Endowment for the Arts): 1990
Christopher Award: 1992, for *The Star Fisher*
Beatty Award (California Library Association): 1994, for *Dragon's Gate*
Phoenix Award (Children's Literature Association): 1995, for *Dragonwings*

FURTHER READING

Books

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Vol. 5, 1990
Berger, Laura Standley, ed. *Twentieth-Century Young Adult Writers,* 1994
Contemporary Authors New Revision Series, Vol. 46, 1995
Drew, Bernard A. *The 100 Most Popular Young Adult Authors: Biographical Sketches and Bibliographies,* 1996
Gallo, Donald, R. *Speaking for Ourselves: Autobiographical Sketches by Notable Authors of Books for Young Adults,* 1990
Hipple, Ted, Jr., ed. *Writers for Young Adults,* 1997
Holtze, Sally Holmes, ed. *Fifth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators,* 1983
Johnson-Feelings, Dianne. *Presenting Laurence Yep,* 1995
Kutzer, M. Daphne. *Writers of Multicultural Fiction for Young Adults: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook,* 1996
Major Authors and Illustrators for Children and Young Adults, 1993
Silvey, Anita, ed. *Children's Books and Their Creators,* 1995
Who's Who in America, 1995
Yep, Laurence. *The Lost Garden,* 1991

Periodicals

Children's Literature in Education, June 1992, p.107
CMLEA Journal, Fall 1991, p.8
English Journal, Mar. 1982, p.81
Horn Book, Apr. 1978, p.137; May/June 1989, p.318
Lion and the Unicorn, Vol. 5, 1981, p.4
New York Times Book Review, Nov. 16, 1975, p.30
Publishers Weekly, June 16, 1975, p.82; May 16, 1994, p.25
Reading Teacher, Jan.1977, p.359
San Francisco Chronicle, Oct. 9, 1991, p.E3
Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Mar. 12, 1993, p.18; May 26, 1995, p.18

Video

Good Conversation! A Talk with Laurence Yep, 1998

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How to Use the Cumulative Index

Our indexes have a new look. In an effort to make our indexes easier to use, we've combined the Name and General Index into a new, cumulative General Index. This single ready-reference resource covers all the volumes in *Biography Today,* both the general series and the special subject series. The new General Index contains complete listings of all individuals who have appeared in *Biography Today* since the series began. Their names appear in bold-faced type, followed by the issue in which they appear. The General Index also includes references for the occupations, nationalities, and ethnic and minority origins of individuals profiled in *Biography Today.*

We have also made some changes to our specialty indexes, the Places of Birth Index and the Birthday Index. To consolidate and to save space, the Places of Birth Index and the Birthday Index will no longer appear in the January and April issues of the softbound subscription series. But these indexes can still be found in the September issue of the softbound subscription series, in the hardbound Annual Cumulation at the end of each year, and in each volume of the special subject series.

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The General Series of *Biography Today* is denoted in the index with the month and year of the issue in which the individual appeared. Each individual also appears in the Annual Cumulation for that year.

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Special Subject Series

The Special Subject Series of *Biography Today* are each denoted in the index with an abbreviated form of the series name, plus the number of the volume in which the individual appears. They are listed as follows.

Adams, Ansel	Artist V.1	(Artists Series)
Curtis, Christopher Paul	Author V.4	(Authors Series)
Gould, Stephen Jay	Science V.2	(Scientists & Inventors Series)
Hingis, Martina	Sport V.2	(Sports Series)
Peterson, Roger Tory	WorLdr V.1	(World Leaders Series: Environmental Leaders)
Sadat, Anwar	WorLdr V.2	(World Leaders Series: Modern African Leaders)

Updates

Updated information on selected individuals appears in the Appendix at the end of the *Biography Today* Annual Cumulation. In the index, the original entry is listed first, followed by any updates.

Arafat, Yasir . . Sep 94; Update 94; Update 95; Update 96; Update 97; Update 98
Gates, Bill . . . . . Apr 93; Update 98
Griffith Joyner, Florence . . . . . Sport V.1; Update 98
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1	Salinger, J.D.	1919
2	Asimov, Isaac	1920
4	Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds	1933
	Shula, Don	1930
7	Rodriguez, Eloy	1947
8	Hawking, Stephen W.	1942
9	Menchu, Rigoberta	1959
	Nixon, Richard	1913
12	Limbaugh, Rush	1951
14	Lucid, Shannon	1943
15	Werbach, Adam	1973
16	Fossey, Dian	1932
17	Carrey, Jim	1962
	Cormier, Robert	1925
	Jones, James Earl	1931
	Lewis, Shari	?1934
18	Ali, Muhammad	1942
	Messier, Mark	1961
19	Askins, Renee	1959
	Johnson, John	1918
21	Domingo, Placido	1941
	Nicklaus, Jack	1940
	Olajuwon, Hakeem	1963
22	Chavis, Benjamin	1948
23	Thiessen, Tiffani-Amber	1974
25	Alley, Kirstie	1955
28	Gretzky, Wayne	1961
29	Abbey, Edward	1927
	Gilbert, Sara	1975
	Hasek, Dominik	1965
	Peet, Bill	1915
	Winfrey, Oprah	1954
31	Robinson, Jackie	1919
	Ryan, Nolan	1947

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1	Spinelli, Jerry	1941
	Yeltsin, Boris	1931
3	Nixon, Joan Lowery	1927
	Rockwell, Norman	1894
4	Parks, Rosa	1913
5	Aaron, Hank	1934
6	Leakey, Mary	1913
	Rosa, Emily	1987
	Zmeskal, Kim	1976
7	Brooks, Garth	1962
	Wang, An	1920
	Wilder, Laura Ingalls	1867
8	Grisham, John	1955
10	Konigsburg, E.L.	1930
	Norman, Greg	1955
11	Brandy	1979
12	Blume, Judy	1938
	Kurzweil, Raymond	1948
15	Groening, Matt	1954
	Van Dyken, Amy	1973
17	Anderson, Marian	1897
	Hargreaves, Alison	1962
	Jordan, Michael	1963
18	Morrison, Toni	1931
20	Adams, Ansel	1902
	Barkley, Charles	1963
	Cobain, Kurt	1967
	Crawford, Cindy	1966
	Hernandez, Livan	1975
21	Carpenter, Mary Chapin	1958
	Jordan, Barbara	1936
	Mugabe, Robert	1924
24	Jobs, Steven	1955
	Vernon, Mike	1963
	Whitestone, Heather	1973
25	Voigt, Cynthia	1942
27	Clinton, Chelsea	1980
28	Andretti, Mario	1940
	Pauling, Linus	1901

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1	Ellison, Ralph Waldo	1914
	Murie, Olaus J.	1889
	Rabin, Yitzhak	1922
	Zamora, Pedro	1972
2	Gorbachev, Mikhail	1931
	Satcher, David	1941
	Seuss, Dr.	1904

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3	Hooper, Geoff	1979
	Joyner-Kersee, Jackie	1962
	MacLachlan, Patricia	1938
4	Morgan, Garrett	1877
5	Margulis, Lynn	1938
7	McCarty, Oseola	1908
10	Guy, Jasmine	1964
	Miller, Shannon	1977
12	Hamilton, Virginia	1936
13	Van Meter, Vicki	1982
14	Hanson, Taylor	1983
15	Ginsburg, Ruth Bader	1933
16	O'Neal, Shaquille	1972
17	Hamm, Mia	1972
	Nureyev, Rudolf	1938
18	Blair, Bonnie	1964
	de Klerk, F.W.	1936
	Queen Latifah	1970
19	Blanchard, Rachel	1976
20	Lee, Spike	1957
	Lowry, Lois	1937
21	Gilbert, Walter	1932
	O'Donnell, Rosie	1962
22	Shatner, William	1931
25	Lovell, Jim	1928
	Steinem, Gloria	1934
	Swoopes, Sheryl	1971
26	Allen, Marcus	1960
	Erdös, Paul	1913
	O'Connor, Sandra Day	1930
	Stockton, John	1962
27	Carey, Mariah	1970
28	James, Cheryl	
	McEntire, Reba	1955
30	Dion, Celine	1968
	Hammer	1933
31	Chavez, Cesar	1927
	Gore, Al	1948
	Howe, Gordie	1928

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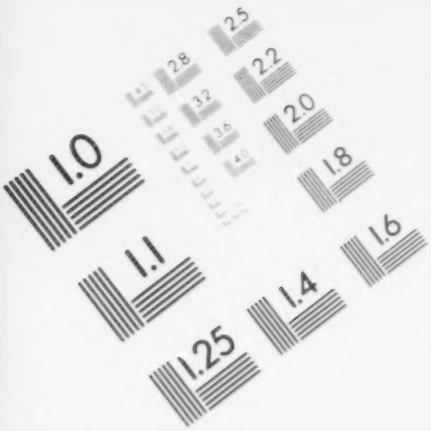
1	Maathai, Wangari	1940
2	Carvey, Dana	1955
3	Garth, Jennie	1972
	Goodall, Jane	1934
	Street, Picabo	1971
4	Angelou, Maya	1928
5	Powell, Colin	1937
6	Watson, James D.	1928
7	Dougals, Marjory Stoneman	1890
8	Annan, Kofi	1938
10	Madden, John	1936
12	Cleary, Beverly	1916
	Danes, Claire	1979
	Doherty, Shannen	1971
	Letterman, David	1947
	Soto, Gary	1952
13	Brandis, Jonathan	1976
	Henry, Marguerite	1902
14	Gellar, Sarah Michelle	1977
	Maddux, Greg	1966
	Rose, Pete	1941
16	Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem	1947
	Selena	1971
	Williams, Garth	1912
17	Champagne, Larry III	1985
18	Hart, Melissa Joan	1976
22	Levi-Montalcini, Rita	1909
	Oppenheimer, J. Robert	1904
25	Fitzgerald, Ella	1917
26	Pei, I.M.	1917
27	Wilson, August	1945
28	Baker, James	1930
	Duncan, Lois	1934
	Hussein, Saddam	1937
	Kaunda, Kenneth	1924
	Leno, Jay	1950
29	Agassi, Andre	1970
	Seinfeld, Jerry	1954

May		Year
2	Spock, Benjamin	1903
5	Maxwell, Jody-Anne	1986
7	Land, Edwin	1909
9	Bergen, Candice	1946
	Yzerman, Steve	1965
10	Cooney, Caroline B.	1947
	Curtis, Christopher Paul	1953
	Jamison, Judith	1944
11	Farrakhan, Louis	1933
13	Rodman, Dennis	1961
14	Lucas, George	1944
	Smith, Emmitt	1969
15	Albright, Madeleine	1937
	Johns, Jasper	1930
	Zindel, Paul	1936
17	Paulsen, Gary	1939
18	John Paul II	1920
19	Brody, Jane	1941
	Hansberry, Lorraine	1930
21	Robinson, Mary	1944



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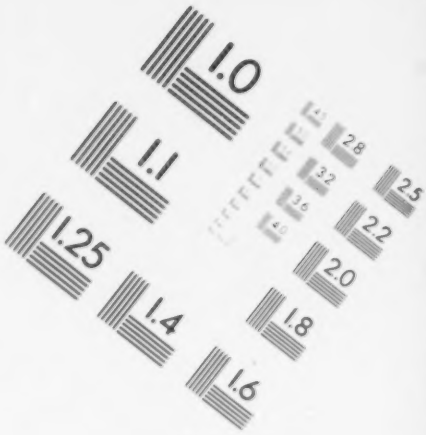

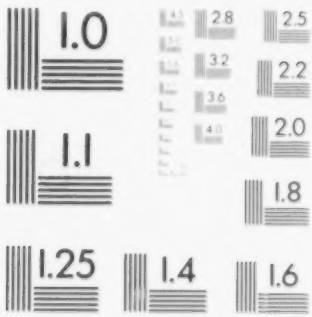

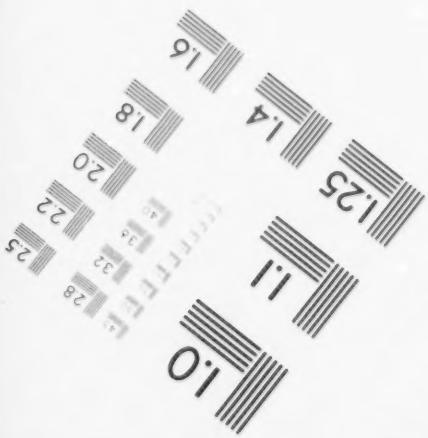

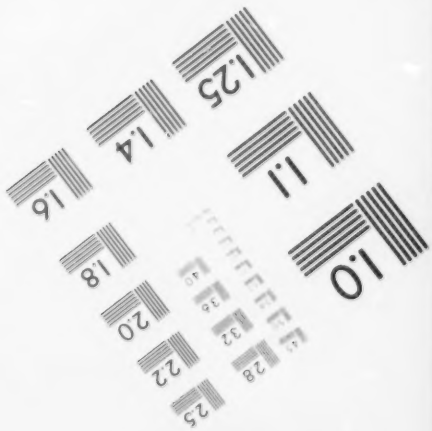

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May (continued)		Year
23	Bardeen, John	1908
	Jewel	1974
	O'Dell, Scott	1898
24	Dumars, Joe	1963
26	Ride, Sally	1951
27	Carson, Rachel	1907
	Kerr, M.E.	1927
28	Johnston, Lynn	1947
	Shabazz, Betty	1936
30	Cohen, Adam Ezra	1979

June		Year
1	Lalas, Alexi	1970
	Morissette, Alanis	1974
4	Kistler, Darci	1964
5	Scarry, Richard	1919
6	Rylant, Cynthia	1954
7	Brooks, Gwendolyn	1917
	Oleynik, Larisa	1981
8	Bush, Barbara	1925
	Edelman, Marian Wright	1939
	Wayans, Keenen Ivory	1958
	Wright, Frank Lloyd	1869
10	Frank, Anne	1929
	Lipinski, Tara	1982
	Sendak, Maurice	1928
11	Cousteau, Jacques	1910
	Montana, Joe	1956
12	Bush, George	1924
13	Allen, Tim	1953
	Christo	1935
14	Bourke-White, Margaret	1904
	Graf, Steffi	1969
	Summitt, Pat	1952
	Yep, Laurence	1948
15	Horner, Jack	1946
	Jacques, Brian	1939
16	McClintock, Barbara	1902
	Shakur, Tupac	1971
17	Gingrich, Newt	1943
	Jansen, Dan	1965
	Williams, Venus	1980
18	Morris, Nathan	1971
	Van Allsburg, Chris	1949
19	Abdul, Paula	1962
	Aung San Suu Kyi	1945
20	Goodman, John	1952
21	Bhutto, Benazir	1953
	Breathed, Berke	1957
22	Bradley, Ed	1941
23	Rudolph, Wilma	1940
	Thomas, Clarence	1948
25	Carle, Eric	1929
	Gibbs, Lois	1951
26	LeMond, Greg	1961
27	Babbitt, Bruce	1938
	Perot, H. Ross	1930
28	Elway, John	1960

July		Year
1	Brower, David	1912
	Diana, Princess of Wales	1961
	Duke, David	1950
	Lewis, Carl	1961
	McCully, Emily Arnold	1939
2	George, Jean Craighead	1919
	Marshall, Thurgood	1908
	Petty, Richard	1937
	Thomas, Dave	1932
5	Watterson, Bill	1958
6	Dalai Lama	1935
7	Chagall, Marc	1887
	Heinlein, Robert	1907
	Kwan, Michelle	1980
8	Hardaway, Anfernee "Penny"	1971
	Sealfon, Rebecca	1983
9	Hanks, Tom	1956
	Hassan II	1929
	Krim, Mathilde	1926
10	Ashe, Arthur	1943
	Boulmerka, Hassiba	1969
11	Cisneros, Henry	1947
	White, E.B.	1899
12	Cosby, Bill	1937
	Yamaguchi, Kristi	1972
13	Ford, Harrison	1942
	Stewart, Patrick	1940
15	Aristide, Jean-Bertrand	1953
16	Johnson, Jimmy	1943
	Sanders, Barry	1968
18	Glenn, John	1921
	Mandela, Nelson	1918
19	Tarvin, Herbert	1985
20	Hillary, Sir Edmund	1919
21	Reno, Janet	1938
	Williams, Robin	1952
22	Calder, Alexander	1898
	Dole, Bob	1923
	Hinton, S.E.	1948
23	Haile Selassie	1892

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24	Abzug, Bella	1920
	Krone, Julie	1963
	Wilson, Mara	1987
26	Berenstain, Jan	1923
28	Davis, Jim	1945
29	Burns, Ken	1953
	Creech, Sharon	1945
	Dole, Elizabeth Hanford	1936
	Jennings, Peter	1938
	Morris, Wanya	1973
30	Hill, Anita	1956
	Moore, Henry	1898
	Schroeder, Pat	1940
31	Reid Banks, Lynne	1929

August		Year
1	Brown, Ron	1941
	Coolio	1963
	Garcia, Jerry	1942
2	Baldwin, James	1924
	Healy, Bernadine	1944
3	Roper, Dee Dee	
	Savimbi, Jonas	1934
5	Ewing, Patrick	1962
	Jackson, Shirley Ann	1946
6	Robinson, David	1965
	Warhol, Andy	?1928
7	Byars, Betsy	1928
	Duchovny, David	1960
	Leakey, Louis	1903
8	Boyd, Candy Dawson	1946
9	Anderson, Gillian	1968
	Houston, Whitney	1963
	McKissack, Patricia C	1944
	Sanders, Deion	1967
	Travers, P.L	?1899
11	Haley, Alex	1921
	Hogan, Hulk	1953
12	Martin, Ann M	1955
	McKissack, Fredrick L	1939
	Myers, Walter Dean	1937
	Sampras, Pete	1971
13	Battle, Kathleen	1948
	Castro, Fidel	1927
14	Berry, Halle	?1967
	Johnson, Magic	1959
	Larson, Gary	1950
15	Ellerbee, Linda	1944
18	Murie, Margaret	1902
19	Clinton, Bill	1946
	Soren, Tabitha	1967
20	Chung, Connie	1946
22	Bradbury, Ray	1920
	Schwarzkopf, H. Norman	1934
23	Novello, Antonia	1944
	Phoenix, River	1970
24	Arafat, Yasir	1929
	Ripken, Cal, Jr.	1960
26	Burke, Christopher	1965
	Culkin, Macaulay	1980
	Sabin, Albert	1906
	Teresa, Mother	1910
	Tuttle, Merlin	1941
27	Nechita, Alexandra	1985
28	Dove, Rita	1952
	Evans, Janet	1971
	Peterson, Roger Tory	1908
	Priestley, Jason	1969
	Rimes, LeAnn	1982
29	Hesse, Karen	1952
30	Earle, Sylvia	1935
31	Perlman, Itzhak	1945

September		Year
1	Estefan, Gloria	1958
2	Bearden, Romare	?1912
	Galeczka, Chris	1981
4	Wright, Richard	1908
5	Guisewite, Cathy	1950
7	Lawrence, Jacob	1917
	Moses, Grandma	1860
	Pippig, Uta	1965
8	Prelutsky, Jack	1940
	Thomas, Jonathan Taylor	1982
10	Gould, Stephen Jay	1941
13	Johnson, Michael	1967
	Monroe, Bill	1911
	Taylor, Mildred D	1943
15	dePaola, Tomie	1934
	Marino, Dan	1961
16	Dahl, Roald	1916
17	Burger, Warren	1907
18	de Mille, Agnes	1905
	Fields, Debbi	1956
21	Fielder, Cecil	1963
	King, Stephen	1947
	Nkrumah, Kwame	1909

September (continued)		Year
22	Richardson, Dot	1961
23	Nevelson, Louise	1899
24	Ochoa, Severo	1905
25	Locklear, Heather	1961
	Lopez, Charlotte	1976
	Pippen, Scottie	1965
	Reeve, Christopher	1952
	Smith, Will	1968
	Walters, Barbara	1931
26	Mandela, Winnie	1934
	Stockman, Shawn	1972
27	Handford, Martin	1956
28	Cray, Seymour	1925
29	Berenstain, Stan	1923
	Guey, Wendy	1983
	Gumbel, Bryant	1948
30	Hingis, Martina	1980
	Moceanu, Dominique	1981

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1	Carter, Jimmy	1924
	McGwire, Mark	1963
2	Leibovitz, Annie	1949
3	Campbell, Neve	1973
	Herriot, James	1916
	Winfield, Dave	1951
4	Cushman, Karen	1941
	Rice, Anne	1941
5	Fitzhugh, Louise	1928
	Hill, Grant	1972
	Lemieux, Mario	1965
	Lin, Maya	1959
	Winslet, Kate	1975
6	Lobo, Rebecca	1973
7	Ma, Yo-Yo	1955
8	Jackson, Jesse	1941
	Ringgold, Faith	1930
	Stine, R.L.	1943
9	Bryan, Zachery Ty	1981
	Senghor, Léopold Sédar	1906
10	Favre, Brett	1969
	Saro-Wiwa, Ken	1941
11	Perry, Luke	?1964
	Young, Steve	1961
12	Childress, Alice	?1920
	Ward, Charlie	1970
13	Carter, Chris	1956
	Kerrigan, Nancy	1969
	Rice, Jerry	1962
14	Daniel, Beth	1956
	Mobutu Sese Seko	1930
15	Iacocca, Lee A.	1924
16	Stewart, Kordell	1972
17	Jemison, Mae	1956
18	Foreman, Dave	1946
	Marsalis, Wynton	1961
	Navratilova, Martina	1956
	Suzuki, Shinichi	1898
20	Kenyatta, Jomo	?1891
	Mantle, Mickey	1931
21	Gillespie, Dizzy	1956
22	Hanson, Zac	1985
23	Crichton, Michael	1942
	Pelé	1940
26	Clinton, Hillary Rodham	1947
27	Anderson, Terry	1947
28	Gates, Bill	1955
	Salk, Jonas	1914
29	Ryder, Winona	1971
31	Candy, John	1950
	Paterson, Katherine	1932
	Pauley, Jane	1950

November		Year
2	lang, k.d.	1961
3	Arnold, Roseanne	1952
4	Combs, Sean (Puff Daddy)	1969
	Handler, Ruth	1916
8	Mittermeier, Russell A.	1949
9	Denton, Sandi	
	Sagan, Carl	1934
11	DiCaprio, Leonardo	1974
	Vonnegut, Kurt	1922
12	Andrews, Ned	1980
	Harding, Tonya	1970
	Sosa, Sammy	1968
13	Goldberg, Whoopi	1949
14	Boutros-Ghali, Boutros	1922
15	O'Keeffe, Georgia	1887
16	Baiul, Oksana	1977
17	Fuentes, Daisy	1966
	Hanson, Ike	1980
18	Driscoll, Jean	1966
	Mankiller, Wilma	1945
19	Devers, Gail	1966
	Strug, Kerri	1977
21	Aikman, Troy	1966
	Griffey, Ken, Jr.	1969
	Speare, Elizabeth George	1908

November (continued)		Year
24	Ndeti, Cosmas	1971
25	Grant, Amy	1960
	Thomas, Lewis	1913
26	Pine, Elizabeth Michele	1975
	Schulz, Charles	1922
27	Nye, Bill	1955
	White, Jaleel	1977
29	L'Engle, Madeleine	1918
	Lewis, C. S.	1898
	Tubman, William V. S.	1895
30	Jackson, Bo	1962
	Parks, Gordon	1912

December		Year
2	Macaulay, David	1946
	Seles, Monica	1973
	Watson, Paul	1950
3	Filipovic, Zlata	1980
7	Bird, Larry	1956
8	Rivera, Diego	1886
12	Bialik, Mayim	1975
	Frankenthaler, Helen	1928
	Sinatra, Frank	1915
13	Fedorov, Sergei	1969
15	Aidid, Mohammed Farah	1934
	Mendes, Chico	1944
16	Bailey, Donovan	1967
	McCary, Michael	1971
	Mead, Margaret	1901
18	Pitt, Brad	1964
	Sanchez Vicario, Arantxa	1971
	Spielberg, Steven	1947
19	Morrison, Sam	1936
	White, Reggie	1961
21	Evert, Chris	1954
	Griffith Joyner, Florence	1959
22	Pinkney, Jerry	1939
23	Avi	1937
	Harbaugh, Jim	1963
25	Sadat, Anwar	1918
26	Butcher, Susan	1954
27	Roberts, Cokie	1943
28	Washington, Denzel	1954
30	Woods, Tiger	1975

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